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THE DISGUISED GUIDE; or, WILD RAVEN, THE RANGER OF THE NORTH.

BY OLL COOMES.

AUTHOR OF "VAGABOND JOE," "THE DUMB SPY," "ANTELOPE ABE," "KEEN-KNIFE," "PROSPECT PETE," ETC., ETC.



"PERHAPS," SAID THE STRANGER, "YOU'VE HEARN TELL OF ME, AND PERHAPS YE HAIN'T; BUT I'M THE RAVEN OF THE NORTH,
THE EAGLE OF THE SOUTH, THE DEVIL OF THE EAST AND THE GIANT OF THE WEST."

The Disguised Guide; OR, WILD RAVEN, THE RANGER OF THE NORTH.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "THE PARSON DETECTIVE," "LITTLE
WILDFIRE," "DASHING DICK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISSING GUIDE.

On a bend in the South Platte river the cheerful light of a camp-fire gleamed through the gathering twilight of an early summer evening. Within its circle the form of an elderly female was passing to and fro, engaged in the romantic duty of preparing an emigrant supper in the open air. Near the busy dame sat four men—two engaged in conversation, the third in smoking and his own reflections, while the fourth was busy in polishing a handsome double-barreled rifle of superior workmanship.

Arthur St. Ledger, the eldest of the group, was a man upon whom the flight of five and forty years had left many perceptible traces. His countenance was free and open, and from the depths of his dark eyes there shone a light as warm and genial as that of a tropical sun.

The man with whom he was engaged in conversation was apparently ten years his junior. He was large and well proportioned, with long, grizzled hair, and whiskers of many months' growth. His eyes were black, but rather small for the light of an honest and magnanimous soul to shine through, in case Jake Darle, the guide, possessed such. He was dressed in the style of garb usually worn by the overland guides, and in the capacity of such he was serving Arthur St. Ledger, who had employed him at Independence, Missouri, to accompany them beyond the dangers of the Rocky Mountains; for, at the time of which I write, (1849,) great dangers from the Indians beset the route of the emigrant, and to attempt to travel the overland trail without an efficient guide was a folly bordering on criminality, which many had learned at the cost of their lives. Jake Darle recommended himself, as possessing all the knowledge of an experienced guide and hunter, and relying upon his skill and confidence, St. Ledger felt that his family was comparatively safe under his guidance.

The third man was a type of a different nationality, as the broad face, the humorous expression and loquacious eyes indicated. He was a son of the Emerald Isle—about thirty years of age, possessed of an inordinate love for his inner man, and a pipe and tobacco.

The fourth man was Arthur St. Ledger's son, who was just entering a glorious manhood—possessed of great physical strength and courage—a handsome face and brilliant eyes.

The point where the little party was encamped was well chosen to guard against surprise—being a narrow point of land in an abrupt bend of the Platte river. Thus encompassed on three sides by the water, it would be an easy matter to guard the fourth side against any lurking foe.

When Mrs. St. Ledger had pronounced supper ready, the men gathered around the table, which was made by spreading a cloth upon the ground.

"Where is Blanche, mother?" asked Harry St. Ledger, gazing anxiously about him, when seated at supper.

"Here I am, brother," came a sweet, musical voice from the canvas-covered wagon that stood a few yards in the back-ground, and in a moment Blanche St. Ledger appeared at the supper-table.

She was not more than eighteen summers of age, with a rich profusion of ringlets of dark-brown hair, clustered about a brow of alabaster whiteness, and with large, lustrous eyes that would have rivaled the blackness of a summer midnight. Of a somewhat *petite* but well-developed form—with rosy cheeks, a dimpled chin, and full, ripe lips, Blanche St. Ledger was a model of grace and beauty, upon whom the sharp eyes of Jake Darle would rest at times with uncommon interest.

"Why, Blanche, are you having a fit of melancholy that you are away by yourself?" asked Harry, as she seated herself by his side at the table.

"I won't answer you, Mr. Harry," she replied, with a roguish smile and a petulant toss of her head.

"Very well, eat your supper then," said Harry.

"Faith, and if yees war as nigh stharved as Teddy Muldoon, ye'd not be wasting of yer time a-poking of yer fun at one anither," said the Irishman, without removing his eyes from the plate of soup before him.

"I'd like to know when ye ever did git enuff to eat, Ted, since I've known ye," remarked Jake Darle, the guide, with a sly wink at Mr. St. Ledger.

"Faith," responded Teddy, "me's always gits enough, when me's gits to the table afore yer riverence does."

Darle made no reply to the Irishman's joke. Their supper was concluded in silence.

By this time it had grown dark, and the necessary arrangements for passing the night were speedily made. The horses were tethered out where they could crop the rich, succulent prairie-grass; a small tent was pitched for the women's accommodation, and a guard stationed on the exposed side of the camp.

According to previous arrangements, the first watch fell upon Teddy Muldoon, but Jake Darle insisted very urgently on taking his place. Teddy yielded very readily to the guide's wish, for the latter had informed the emigrants that they were in the most perilous portion of the country, and as the fore part of the night was generally attended with the most danger from the Indians, it was thought that his experience better qualified him for the first watch.

So Darle took his station, and the emigrants retired to rest, Mrs. St. Ledger and her daughter occupying the tent, and the three men the spacious covered wagon.

In a few moments all had sunk into a sound sleep, save Teddy, who for some eccentric curiosity had remained awake, all the while keeping his eyes fixed upon the dark form of the guide, who stood in the shadow of a clump of cottonwood trees.

Now and then Darle would glance toward the wagon, but as Teddy was watching him through a small rent in the canvas, he was unobserved in his movements by the guide.

Presently the Irishman's attention was drawn to another object. Far out on the prairie beyond the river he discovered a dull light moving to and fro like a pendulum; and occasionally he could dimly see the outlines of a dark, motionless figure between.

Teddy Muldoon was naturally a shrewd man—more so than he was ever given credit for—and no sooner did he discover that the mysterious light had arrested the close attention of Darle, the guide, than he became filled with considerable curiosity.

For fully five minutes the light continued its oscillations, then it disappeared entirely. The next moment the guide turned, and walking to the wagon peered in at the men. Foreseeing his intention, Teddy quickly dropped himself upon his bed, and like one in a deep slumber, began a sonorous breathing.

Finding all were asleep, the guide passed on to the little tent and found its inmates likewise in slumber.

Unconscious that the prying eyes of Teddy were upon him, Darle advanced to the smoldering camp-fire, and picking up a burning brand from the embers, walked out to the river-bank. Here he stopped, and holding the blazing fagot above his head, looked off in the direction that the mysterious light had been seen. In a few moments, Darle, as well as the watchful Teddy, saw the light appear again, and at that instant the guide began swinging his torch around and around so swift that his head seemed inclosed in a circle of fire. As soon as he had ceased the performance, the light over the plain began its oscillation again, and then Teddy was fully convinced that the guide was communicating with some one on the prairies, through a system of telegraphy known only between themselves.

A vague suspicion that all was not right, at once arose in the Irishman's mind, and he was about awakening his two friends to witness the strange proceedings, when the light on the prairie faded away. Darle then cast his torch into the river, and turning, he hastened away down the stream. Teddy watched him until his form had faded in the gloom, then he took his rifle, climbed easily out of the wagon, and stationed himself as watch during the guide's absence.

Darle's singular movements had completely perplexed the Irishman's brain. Whether his actions were actuated from good or evil motives, he was at a loss to understand. But when an hour had dragged wearily by, and the

guide did not return, he came to the settled conclusion that he had deserted them. Thus believing, Teddy was on the eve of going to arouse Mr. St. Ledger and his son, when his ear caught the sound of footsteps.

Supposing it was the guide returning, Teddy turned his eye in the direction the sound had emanated, when to his horror he discovered a hideous-looking Pawnee Indian coming toward him.

There was just light enough reflected from the camp-fire to reveal the savage's features, that were aglow with all the evil ferocity of a demon. The villain's eyes wandered first from the wagon to the tent, then back to the wagon again, with a serpent-like expression, and as Teddy was standing in the shadow of a tree, he saw at once that the savage was ignorant of their close proximity, and bringing his rifle to a level with the Indian's breast, he called out:

"Halt, thar, ye red spalpeen, and give an account of yerself, or be the howly Vargin I'll let her go!"

Scarcely had he uttered the last word when the savage gave a startled yell, and drawing his knife, bounded like a tiger toward him. Teddy discharged his rifle, but the ball went wide of its mark, and seeing the danger that menaced him, while possessed of no weapons but his empty rifle, he determined to make good use of it by using it as a shillalah, with which weapon he considered himself a skillful hand; so slipping his hand along to the middle of the barrel, he raised it above his head, gave it a whirl or two, and then brought the muzzle down upon the tufted head of the advancing red-skin with such a force that he was killed instantly.

"Oh, be gorra! bad 'cess to yees that tamper with the likes of Teddy Muldoon, ye red blaggard."

"Good Heavens, Teddy, what's the matter?"

It was Arthur St. Ledger who asked the question, and who, with rifle in hand, stood at Teddy's side. However, before the Irishman could reply, a shrill war-whoop pealed out on the night-air, and the next instant a half-dozen savages came yelling from the gloom of the cottonwood grove toward them.

"Och, be the howly Vargin!" exclaimed Teddy, bracing himself, and whirling his rifle over his head, "come on to yer doom, ye red, murdering vagabones ye; oh, ye screeching hellyons, but yees will git a glorious chastising!"

Two of the advancing savages fell dead under the unerring aim of Arthur St. Ledger and his son; but before they could reload, the living demons were upon them, and a hand-to-hand conflict commenced.

Our friends soon found that they had been taken at a great disadvantage, for their empty rifles at close quarters proved of but little service, save in warding off the blows of the savages; and how the struggle would have ended was a matter of conjecture until a new character, whose deep-toned voice rung high above the yell of the combatants, like the clarion notes of a bugle, appeared upon the scene of action in behalf of our friends. Right into the midst of the conflict he sprang, dealing death-blows right and left upon the tufted skulls of the red-skins, uttering a wild and fearful yell at each blow.

In a moment the last savage had fallen, and then our three friends stood face to face with their unknown deliverer, feeling as much surprise as though they were confronted by a visitor from the planet Jupiter.

The man might have been thirty, or he might have been fifty years of age, tall and lank; standing fully six feet in his moccasins; swelling out in muscular proportion at the hips and shoulders; with a small head, covered with long, disheveled hair; a sharp chin, large yet expressive mouth, a hooked nose, and long, shaggy brows, beneath which gleamed a pair of the most brilliant and wonderful eyes—eyes that were indicative of the warmest friendship and the deadliest hatred on the part of their owner. He carried a long rifle, and a belt filled with knives and pistols.

"Faith, and who have we the honor of thanking for this bit of help?" asked Teddy, advancing toward the stranger and offering his hand.

A clear laugh escaped the man's lips, as he seized the proffered hand in a grip that caused Teddy to wince.

"Perhaps," said the stranger, "you've hearn tell of me, and perhaps ye hain't; but I'm the Raven of the North, the Eagle of the South, the Devil of the East and the Giant of the West. I've hunted bears through polar snows, and savages in the everglades of Florida; I've cut

the throats of pirates on the high seas of the East, and scalped Ingins and bufflers on the plains of the West. To-day I'm a hunter; to-morrow a scout. One day a gentleman, and the next a guide. I've no home in partik'ler; no relations in the world. Every white man with a pure heart is my friend—every red-man is my enemy, the devil included. When first I knew myself, I went by the name of Wildmere Ravenaugh; but since then, time and convenience has shortened it, until I'm known to-day only as Wild Raven; and now, with this bit o' personal hist'ry, I'll take the liberty of axin' if thar's only three o' you here?"

"Thru, Misther Raven, and there's only three of us," quickly responded Teddy. "I mean three of us men."

Wild Raven drew himself up to his full hight, and with his flashing eyes fixed upon Teddy, fairly hissed, through his set teeth,

"Then I'll be cursed if there isn't a traitor in this camp!"

"But there were four of us, Teddy," remarked Mr. St. Ledger, as he, for the first time since the excitement of the fight, noticed the absence of Jake Darle. "Our guide—where is he, Teddy?"

"There, now, ye's coming at the p'int," said the Irishman, and freeing his mouth of a huge quid of tobacco, he related all he had witnessed up to the moment of the guide's disappearance. After he had finished his startling story, Wild Raven asked:

"Who is this Jake Darle?"

"Our guide," replied Mr. St. Ledger.

"The vilest renegade cut-throat that ever plundered an emigrant-wagon!" responded Raven, fiercely. "And now, friends, I advise you to look sharp, for you're in 'siderable danger. I knowed there war a band o' Ingins over the peraroers there, and I knowed there war a traitor in this 'ere camp, for I saw their signals over a mile off, and then I come straight over here to spy 'round a little; and the rest you know, for here I am."

For a moment the emigrants were completely paralyzed with the startling information of Wild Raven. Arthur St. Ledger could scarcely credit the report of Jake Darle's treachery, yet his absence from camp, and the attack of the savages upon them, fully confirmed the accusation.

"Well, Raven," said Mr. St. Ledger, "believing you to be a friend, skilled in the Indians' nature, I appeal to you for advice and assistance in our perilous situation."

"You kin have it, friend, free as the air o' heaven; for it's part o' my nater to help the needy, relieve the sufferin' and skulp Ingins. Ha-ha! the death-groan of savages, friends, is music to the ears o' Wild Raven! I'm jist in my element when I'm among 'em, dealin' out death, red-handed; and now, the first thing that I'll advise, is to move back in this 'ere bend to the water's edge; draw your wagon along, and we kin use it for a kind o' breastwork, for I'm sure we'll need sich protection afore mornin'."

"Then you," said Mr. St. Ledger, turning to Teddy Muldoon, "will harness the horses to the wagon and draw it in, while Harry and I arouse the women and move their tent."

Teddy laid aside his rifle and started off to where the animals had been tethered out to grass, while Mr. St. Ledger and his son turned and proceeded toward the tent.

"It's curious that mother and Blanche have not been aroused by the noise of our late struggle. Surely nothing has happened them," said Harry, as he pushed aside the canvas-door and entered the tent; but as he did so, he uttered a cry of horror, staggered forward and fell to his knees.

Signs of a desperate struggle were in the tent. Blanche St. Ledger was missing, while her mother, with the blood streaming from her mouth and nostrils, lay unconscious upon the ground.

CHAPTER II.

PADDY VERSUS RED-SKIN.

LIFTING the inanimate form of his wife in his strong arms, Arthur St. Ledger carried her out and placed her tenderly upon a blanket near the camp-fire. Water was hastily brought from the river, and the blood washed from her face, which was greatly bruised and swollen. St. Ledger placed his hand upon her breast. Life was not extinct—there was a perceptible beating of the heart. Brandy was brought from the wagon and poured in her mouth, while her temples and limbs were being chafed, and her brow cooled with cloths saturated with cold water. Presently there were signs of returning consciousness, though it was some time before

she had sufficiently recovered to enable her to speak; and to add to the deplorable state of affairs, in the mean time, Teddy returned, and with a look of abject disappointment upon his face, reported that the horses were stolen—that he could find them nowhere.

Thus deprived of their beasts, the emigrants succeeded, by an effort of their combined strength, in moving the wagon to the desired spot. The tent was moved, the bed in it rearranged, and Mrs. St. Ledger placed upon it. By this time she had so far recovered as to be enabled to give the following account of Blanche's absence:

"We were awakened by the first noise, and springing up, we hastily dressed. Blanche now looked out and saw, by the light of the camp-fire, that you were being sorely pressed by the Indians, and expressed her determination of going to assist you; but at that moment, the dark form of a savage entered the tent, and throwing a blanket over her head and shoulders, lifted her in his arms and turned to flee; but before he could take a step I sprang forward, and seizing Blanche around the waist, was about to cry out, when the wretch struck me a blow with his fist that felled me unconscious to the ground. And now, Arthur, tell me if our poor Blanche is gone?"

"She is, Sarah; but cheer up," said the husband, consolingly, "she shall be returned to you, free and unharmed."

Wild Raven, who had been a silent witness to Mrs. St. Ledger's grief, now broke forth in a vehement and passionate tone:

"As true as thar's a God in Heaven, frien's, I'll rescue that gal afore another week passes over our heads! I'll do it, sink or swim, if I've got to go right into the heart of the Pawnee village. The devil that struck you, ma'am, in the tent, was not an Ingins, for an Ingins never strikes unless it's with a tomahawk or knife. It was a white man with a black heart, which I'll have or die. But I kin do nothing to-night to'rds follelin' a trail with certainty, besides you'll need my 'sistance here afore another sunrise, or my name's not Raven."

"Now, Misther Raven, if ye's done wid that bit o' a speech, jist tell me's, if ye pl'ase, what dark o'ject that is moving up the body o' that three in this direction?" said Teddy, pointing toward a tall cottonwood tree some distance west of their present camp.

Wild Raven looked in the direction indicated, and as his eyes fell upon the object, an exclamation burst from his lips:

"I swear, Irish, you've a keen eye to business," he said, clapping Teddy kindly upon the shoulder, "for, as I live, that object is a Pawnee Ingins, and if he don't drap from there quicker than he went up, Wild Raven's no skunk-killer."

True enough; all eyes saw the dark form of a savage climbing up the body of a tall tree, which was plainly outlined against the western sky, and which stood about two hundred yards from the camp.

The object of the savage's lofty movement was readily manifested.

The point where our friends had pitched their camp was in a low, dry sink or basin, some twenty feet in diameter, and about six feet below the general surface around it. Thus, they were securely screened upon all sides from enemies upon the ground, and it was very evident now, that the savage was ascending the tree, so as to command a view of the interior of the camp and pick off the emigrants at leisure. This would have been an easy task for a concealed marksman, for the full round moon made a small object perceptible at a great distance.

Wild Raven inserted into his long rifle a charge suitable to the distance, then resting the muzzle upon the bank, he took a steady aim upon the savage. There was a vivid flash—a clear whip-like report, followed by a piercing shriek, and the body of the savage went crashing down among the branches, and struck the ground, a piece of mangled pulp.

"Hal ha!" burst triumphantly from the scout's lips; "sich is the vengeance of the Raven of the North, the Eagle of the South, the Devil of the East, and the Giant of the West. Sich is life on the plains, my friends; and may the Lord spare me to enjoy it until I can see, from yon mountain-tops, the long caravan of future adventurers pouring west toward the silent sun, unmolested by the red marauders of the plain. Then, and not until then, will I feel content to lay aside my rifle, and be called from this great trail o' life—where I know not, but I hope it'll not be to the region of everlasting heat, whar the skulpless heads o' a thousand Ingins would allers be reflected to my view, and whar

the headless bodies of land-robbers and seapirates go struttin' about with all the pompos'ty of their former days, s'archin' for—well, whoever it may consarn. No, no friends, I b'lieve I was placed here for some good purpose, and surely, in fulfillin' that purpose, Wild Raven's name will be allowed a corner in the Lamb's book o' Life."

"Faith, Misther Raven, and it's ye what spakes wid the eloquence of an orator, and the spirit of a Christian gentleman. Teddy Muldoon he's no gift of gab, yet he always *thinks* thanks to His holy riverence, for his daily portion of bread and bit of tobaccy," said Teddy, as he produced his pipe, and began loading it with very obnoxious tobacco.

"I say, Irish,er," said Raven, drawing a large briar-root pipe from his pocket, "jist give us a load o' yer weed, as I'm rather short o' the kind jist now."

As he drew his tobacco-bag from his pocket, Teddy caught sight of the scout's pipe, and fairly winced at the enormity of its size, but placing it in Raven's hand, he turned to look for something on which to strike a match. At the top of the basin he discovered a flat stone, and crawling up the bank, seated himself by it and struck the match. For a moment he screened the tiny blaze in his hand, then applying it to his pipe, looking straight down his nose as he did so, he began to puff out great whiffs of blue smoke; but ere he had removed the blazing match, a bullet, from the rifle of an unseen foe, went whizzing through the air, and striking the bowl of the Irishman's pipe, shattered it to pieces—even snatching, as it were, the stem from between his teeth.

"Och, and be the howly Vargin!" exclaimed the startled and bereaved Irishman, as he went tumbling headlong into the basin, "me pipe—me pipe is gone, and may me life be spared the loss, and thra shillings to you, dear Misther Raven, for yer tub of a pipe!"

Despite the solemnity of the occasion, Mr. and Mrs. St. Ledger could not restrain a smile, while Wild Raven burst into a fit of laughter at Teddy's expense. However, the moment the Irishman had gained his feet, he seized his rifle, and regardless of the consequences, would have rushed headlong in pursuit of the despoiler of his pipe, had he not been detained by the scout.

"Hold on here, Irish,er," he said, seizing him by the shoulder, "don't let the loss o' your pipe cost you your skulp. It would be rashness to go out o' this basin, for I'll bet a land title in the vicinity o' the North Pole, that you'd be riddled by a dozen bullets. Be easy, and you can share my pipe while we're here."

"Jist as ye say, Misther Raven," said Teddy, laying aside his rifle, "but be the howly Vargin, it's going ag'in'st the grain to let thet murtherin', distructive h'athin' go widout a schastising from the hands o' Teddy Muldoon."

"Oh, that's nothin', Irish,er," said Raven. "When you've had the experience that I've had 'mong the red cusses, you'll think nothin' 'bout such triflin' mishaps; but here's my pipe; use it until I go into the tent, and inform your friends as how I'll proceed in rescuing their daughter to-morrow."

Teddy took the proffered pipe, and with gun in hand, seated himself to guard the place until the scout should rejoin him. He had been seated about ten minutes, amusing himself by blowing from his mouth miniature clouds of smoke, when he detected a slight noise in the tall buffalo-grass west of the basin. It was such a noise as a serpent would make in crawling through the grass; and feeling a little suspicious, Teddy mechanically raised his rifle, and pointed it at a little star that hung low in the western sky. As he did so, he was conscious of a dark object coming between the star and the muzzle of his piece; and without moving his eyes, he recognized the object to be the tufted head of an Indian, who was evidently trying to get a view of the interior of the little fort.

As Teddy was dressed in dark clothes, and sat within the shadow of the tent, his form was blended in the darkness of the bank beyond; consequently, he was unobserved by the savage, who with gleaming eyes continued to rise slowly up.

Motionless as a statue, Teddy sat with his rifle leveled, and the instant the savage's breast came in range of the muzzle, he fired. A yell of mortal agony followed the report of the rifle, and with a spasmodic upthrowing of the arms, the savage sprang forward and fell dead at Teddy's feet.

Startled by the noise, the inmates of the tent rushed out to learn the cause of it.

"Hangnation, Irisher, what the de'il's the matter out he-ar?" asked Wild Raven, somewhat nettled by the disturbance.

In reply, Teddy coolly pointed to the body of the savage, at the same time removing his pipe from his mouth, and blowing out a perfect cloud of smoke.

At sight of the dead savage, all the wildness of Wild Raven's nature became aroused to its highest pitch.

"Painters and polars!" he exclaimed. "I'll swan to nature, a genuine dead Ingin! Irisher, you're a trump, you're a jewel, you're a cuss, born with eyes ekel to an owl's in the dark, and a coolness of nature ekel to a polar iceberg. You're jist sich a man as I'd like to tramp the length and breadth o' the Ingin nation with, sendin' death into every red marauder's heart, from the sunless region o' the North to the brink o' Rio Gila. Tell us how you winged the bird, Irisher?"

"Faith, and it was easy enough, whin the red varmint came a-avesdroppin' round, and sthuck his dirty nose into the muzzle of me gun."

"Hist!" suddenly commanded the scout.

"What—what now, Misther Raven?" asked the Irishman, in a whisper.

"Didn't you hear that splashin' in the river jist then?"

"I have heard it several times," said Harry St. Ledger.

"Bless yer sowl, and I've been a-hearin' av it for the list half an hour, Misther Raven."

"Waal, now, if I'm not mistaken—and I don't think I am—that sound is made by Ingins thet's tryin' to ketch us asleep; howsumever, I'm goin' to see into it, and in order to do so, I've got to leave this basin."

"But dare you leave here?" asked Mr. St. Ledger.

"I'll try it," said the scout, "and you fellers must keep your eyes open till I return. Jist let thet dead Ingin lay in the basin, for I may need him yit—no tellin'."

Upon his hands and knees the scout crawled from the basin, and was soon lost to the view of those who, in a great measure, were dependent upon his superior knowledge of the red-man. Arthur St. Ledger remained in the tent with his bereaved wife, while his son and Teddy stood guard without.

Anxiously the return of Wild Raven was awaited. The moments dragged wearily by, and the red streaks of morning dawn began to shoot aslant the eastern sky. Slowly the moon glided up the misty hillsides and down the distant dewy glades, now lingering on the broad rivers and the mountain-tops, now floating in liquid softness over the billowy plains and the wild mountain gorges, now paling away in the depths of the somber western sky before the glare of the open day.

CHAPTER III.

CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TRAP.

JUST as the sun looked over the eastern hills, Wild Raven made his appearance in camp with a fine antelope swung over his shoulder.

He found the emigrants stirring busily around. Mrs. St. Ledger had recovered, somewhat, from the shock she had sustained, and was busily engaged in preparing breakfast. But there was a blank look, that portrayed inner sorrow, upon each face. One loved form, a familiar face and voice, were missing from the little group.

Depositing his game upon the ground, the scout removed his cap from his head, and running his long fingers through his hair, said:

"All are safe and looking well."

"Thanks to a merciful Providence, and your help, we are," said Mrs. St. Ledger.

"An' the same to yoursilf, Misther Raven," said Teddy.

"Why shouldn't I be, when I'm always up with mornin' dawn, breathin' the fresh air o' heaven. Then I wash myself in the mornin' dew, breakfast on wild game fresh from the hunt, and slake my thirst at the mountain streams. Ho, good Irisher! Wild Raven's life is one o' the wildest joy—o' never endin' yet ever-changin' adventure. It makes no difference, as the Raven of the North, the Eagle of the South, the Giant o' East and Devil o' West, I'm king o' a host, and that host is myself."

"But what discovery did you make in regard to that sound we heard in the river during the night?" asked St. Ledger.

"Waal, friend, I made quite a diskivery. One that'll surprise you a leetle when you hear't, and that'll convince you that I kin distinguish a sound made by Ingins from a sound made by a animal. Now then, you see that this basin is not over five steps from the bank o' the river—"

"Asily to be seen," interrupted Teddy.

"Waal, now," continued the scout, "if you war standin' over on the other bank, you'd see that this bank is shelvin'—that is, the water has washed the bank out at the bottom, leavin' it projectin' over the water at the top several feet, so at this moment we're not more'n five feet from the edge o' the water and—"

"Faith, and what av that?" again interrupted Teddy.

"Ho, ho!" laughed the scout, leaning forward and speaking in a low tone. "Why, friends, at this very moment a canoe, containing six savages, is moored under this very bank! Think of it; at this time you are within six feet, at least, of six as mean-lookin' Ingins as ever lifted a human skulp!"

For a moment the emigrants seemed paralyzed with the scout's startling information. Mrs. St. Ledger let fall the knife with which she was engaged in slicing dried venison, and uttered a little cry of horror. A shadow of fear clouded the brow of her husband, as his mind reverted to his poor child who was then being carried further and further from them, while the very shadow of death lingered across their own pathway.

"Now, be the howly Vargin! thim rhed, murderin' vagabones are what made the noise in the river last night, eh, Misther Raven?" asked Teddy, evincing some uneasiness.

"The same," answered Raven, "and they'll stay there till they've a chance to steal in on us and rub us out, if possible; but I don't calkerlate they'll git the chance."

"What do you propose doing?" asked Mr. St. Ledger.

"Waal, I calkerlated to go in search o' your gal this mornin', but I swan to nater, I can't go off and leave you folks till you're safe, and that'll not be till we kin git them Ingins from under the bank and git their canoe. Then you kin take it and boat all your things, but your wagon, over onto an island in the river, half a mile below here. Then you'll be safe, fur a while at least, fur the island has quite a growth o' young trees, and is liter'ly kivered with brushwood and undergrowth. It's a good place to catch fish without exposin' yourselves to savage rifles, and if you'll jist keep on a sharp look-out, you'll have no trouble. Once onto the island, you kin remain there until I return with your gal and hosses, and then you kin resume your journey."

"Your plan is a good one," said Mr. St. Ledger, "and I pray Heaven will assist us in carrying it out; but I can not see how you can, with safety to yourself, dislodge those Indians from under that bank and obtain their canoe."

"Waal, I'll explain, friends, arter breakfast, how I'll draw the reds out o' there. I want to make a little 'rangements, fust."

In a few moments breakfast was announced, and the little party seated themselves at the table, which, as at supper, was a cloth spread upon the ground, and partook heartily of the viands prepared by the skillful hands of Mrs. St. Ledger.

While they were thus engaged, Wild Raven detected a slight noise behind him, and turning his head, he beheld, to his utmost surprise, *the head and shoulders of a savage protruding from a hole in the ground within an arm's reach of him!* How he had come there—conjured up from the bowels of the earth, as it were, like a spirit of evil—was readily perceived by the scout and his friends.

As we have before said, about five feet of earth separated the six savages from our friends in the dry basin, and with their knives, it had been a matter of time and patience for the former to dig a hole upward, through the bank under which they were concealed; and, as it happened, whether intended or not, they had succeeded in opening the passage at the north side of the basin, while our friends were at the south side.

It was evident that the red-skin, who had taken upon himself the perilous duty of reconnoitering the situation, was unconscious of his close proximity to his foes, for he evinced as much surprise as did the scout, and attempted to withdraw, but was not quick enough, for Wild Raven swung his long arm around and clutched his bony fingers into the Pawnee's glossy scalp-lock, and held him firm and fast.

Thus caught in his own trap, the savage made known his capture to his own companions by a series of discordant yells; and at once a determined struggle began for the possession of him—the Pawnees under the bank trying to pull him back through the opening, while Raven prevented them very easily by pulling the other way.

Despite their surroundings, the emigrants

could not refrain from laughing at the ludicrous situation of the yelling red-skin, and the comical expression of Wild Raven's face as he clung to the long hair with both hands.

"Painters and polars!" yelled the scout, "this is what I call bisness on a new scale. Hal ha! ha! yell, ye red hellyon; I'll let your friends stretch ye cl'ar 'cross the river, or pull ye out o' your hide afore I'll let go. The Raven o' the North never lets the chance for a skulp slip—specially when it's in his fingers! Oh no, red-skin, sich comes o' pokin' your head into white folks' affairs."

"Oh, be the howly Mother!" cried Teddy, in an ecstasy of joy, "this is the most fun Teddy Muldoon ever saw! Pl'ase, dear Misther Raven, let me's take a lift at the red vagabone's hair, fur jis' like as not he's the murderin' divil what brakes me pipe—oh, swate vengeance!"

Wild Raven allowed Teddy to relieve him in his hold upon the savage's head, and then motioning Mr. St. Ledger aside the two conversed a few moments in an undertone; then St. Ledger turned and entered the tent, and the scout returned to Teddy and his charge.

By this time the savage had ceased his noise, having been exhausted with fear and pain, and seemed reconciled to his fate, although the savages under the bank still clung onto his heels and Teddy to his hair.

"Lookey here, red-skin," said Wild Raven, speaking to the savage in the Indian dialect, "bein's you haven't done us any direct harm, as I know on, I'm goin' to give you a chance for your life on one condition; do you hear?"

The face of the savage brightened up, and a treacherous light, which the scout did not fail to see, gleamed in his small, black, serpent-like eyes, as he replied:

"Monnagah hears the great Raven creak, and will hearken still for his life, though he is not afraid to die. Let the Raven speak, Monnagah's ears are wide."

"Waal, now, if you'll promise to leave here with your companions as soon as you are released, and bother us no more, I'll give you a pint of 'fire-water' and the chance of your life."

"Monnagah has heard the Raven speak," said the Indian, "and will do his bidding. Give fire-water, then leave. I have spoken the truth. Raven can trust in Monnagah's word."

At this moment Arthur St. Ledger appeared with a bottle filled with brandy, which he had brought along from the States for medical purposes, and which was destined to serve in an important crisis.

Taking the bottle in his hand, the scout gave it to the savage, saying, as he did so:

"Here, now, is the fire-water; begone!" Then, to Teddy: "Release him, Irisher." But Teddy did not let go his hold on the red-skin's hair until he had delivered himself of the following threat:

"Now remimber, you rid naygur, if yees don't make yerself sca'ce around here, according to agrament, I'll pounce onto yees till there'll not be a smithereen o' yees left. Now go," and releasing the savage, the scalp-lock glided out of sight quick as a serpent, and the hole was blocked with a log of driftwood.

Scarcely a minute had elapsed after the release of the savage when the ears of our friends were greeted by a mocking and revengeful yell from the throats of their foes under the bank, showing to what extent the promise of the savage had been carried.

But, Wild Raven was too well experienced in the Indians' true character to be caught napping with his eyes open. He knew the Pawnees were a notoriously treacherous set; and in the present case, he knew the savage would stick to his promise only until he was out of sight. But he wished to obtain possession of their canoe, and was compelled to resort to stratagem to effect his purpose. And in allowing the savage to go scot free with the gift of a pint of brandy which he knew they loved, was only to carry destruction to his comrades, for the brandy was *drugged with a powerful narcotic!*

CHAPTER IV.

WHERE IS HE?

WILD RAVEN had decided upon an entirely different plan for dislodging the savages from under the projecting bank, from the one which circumstances induced him to adopt afterward, and which promised to be the safest and most expedient way; so he had nothing to do but to wait and watch for the coming events.

The savages continued their jeers and yells of vengeance upon our friends for some time, then, with a mocking laugh, in which the words "fire-

water" and "cheat pale-face" were distinguished, the noise subsided; and then our friends knew that the bottle was being passed. In a few moments more they heard the words—evidently intended for their ears—"Waugh! heap good fire-water," and all became silent again.

"Bad 'cess to yees rhed murthering blaw-gards," said Teddy. "And it's meself that's thinking as what ye'll soon be laughing out o' the ither side o' yer mouths."

Our friends now seated themselves around the breakfast-table again, for their meal was but half finished when the savage made his appearance in the quietude of their little fort.

After breakfast had been dispatched, Wild Raven concluded to look after his savage enemies, who had grown perfectly quiet under their shelter, and no doubt under the influence of the potent drug, although it had been scarcely time for it to operate; and besides, it was expected that the savages would make some noise or sign of pain. But as Raven could hear nothing, he crawled from the basin and approached the river-bank, and as he did so, a shout of triumph escaped his lips.

"Here, friends, all of you," he called, "come and see our triumph over our enemies."

The emigrants hastened to the scout's side, and to their great joy, beheld a large canoe, containing the bodies of six savages, floating at the will of the current about fifty yards below where they stood.

"Sich, my friends, is life on the plains," said Wild Raven, explanatorily. "In them red varmints ye behold the future fate o' the Ingin nation, and I hope my life will be spared to bring the last one to grief."

"You seem to have a deadly hatred toward the Indian," said Mr. St. Ledger.

"I know't. I am an exception to all God's creators. I love no one in pertikler, yet everybody with a true heart is my friend. To me the world is nothin' but a great play-ground—the people its players in the game of life, of which there are but two sides, one Right, the other Wrong;—but I'm digressin', as the preacher says. That canoe must be secured before it gets beyond reach o' the shore!"

So saying he hastened to a point opposite the canoe where the bank sloped gradually to the water's edge, and by means of his long rifle, succeeded in drawing the canoe to the shore. Then stepping into it, he paddled the canoe back to the camp. Then, by the scout's orders, a craft was constructed of floating logs and brush, and on it the six soundly-sleeping savages were laid, well secured from any overflow of the flood. The raft was then towed out into the swift middle current and set loose. In a few moments it was gone, with its burden of profound sleepers. When they would come out from that lethargic repose, many miles indeed would have been put between them and their foes!

Immediate preparations were now made for embarking to the island spoken of by the scout. Such articles as the emigrants had in their wagon, were stowed in the canoe, and as Wild Raven was an expert with the oar, the duty of running the boat down to the island fell upon his shoulders.

In a few moments all had been arranged, and the canoe put out from shore, and turned down the stream. In the meantime, in order to facilitate the embarkation, the emigrants followed along the shore, but owing to the vast amount of drift-wood that was lodged in among the sickly cottonwoods that lined the banks, their progress was slow; so that when Wild Raven had reached the island, they were a quarter of a mile behind.

The Platte river is a stream remarkable for its width and shallowness, yet there are points where it is both wide and deep, and one of these points was where the little island in question nestled down in its bosom. The island was small—not more than eight rods long and five wide. It was covered with a dense growth of willow and small cottonwood trees, while a great amount of drift-wood was lodged upon it. Although it was within rifle-shot of either shore, it was an admirable place to guard against the sudden attack of the savages; and consequently, it was well suited for the retreat of our friends.

Landing on the upper side of the island, the scout hastily removed the articles from the canoe, and placed them a few steps inland; and then, in order to facilitate his movements, he removed his belt and small-arms, and placing them and his rifle along with the emigrants' articles, he sprang into the canoe, seized the oars, and started on his return for the emigrants,

who were still about three hundred yards distant above the island, and hidden from view in the undergrowth.

Scarcely had Wild Raven got clear of the island when a small canoe, containing two Indians, glided noiselessly around from the opposite side and stood in directly between the scout and the island. Raven was not slow in discovering their presence, and a pang of the deepest regret smote his breast as he saw that the savages were between him and every weapon he possessed—having left them on the island—while they were well armed. The scout was in a dilemma. To attempt to recover his weapons would be folly, and to try to escape in his canoe would be utterly impossible, for the savages in their feather-like craft could easily have outstripped him in a race. He gazed toward the shore, hopeful that the emigrants had discovered his danger, and would contrive some way to aid him, but nowhere could they be seen, and there was but one alternative, for already a rifle was leveled at his breast, and in another minute the Raven of the North would be a dead man.

Quickly measuring with his eye the distance that was between him and his enemies, the scout sprang to his feet, but, as he did so, his canoe rocked violently; the savage's rifle cracked; the scout reeled, uttered a cry of mortal agony, staggered forward and fell from the canoe and was swallowed up in the silent waters of the river!

CHAPTER V.

RED WOLF.

BLANCHE ST. LEDGER was a girl possessed of great presence of mind and strength and courage for one of her sensitive nature, and the moment she felt herself lifted in a pair of savage arms and carried from the tent, she endeavored repeatedly to draw from her dress-pocket a small silver-mounted revolver, in the use of which she was no novice. But every attempt was in vain; her arms were pinioned fast, and her struggles were like those of an infant in the arms of its nurse. She tried to cry out, but her voice was stifled in the folds of a heavy blanket which almost suffocated her. Poor Blanche! she saw how useless it was to spend her strength in vain struggles for escape; there was no alternative but to submit to her abductor's will, and trust to a merciful Providence for a safe restoration to her friends.

After her abductor had carried her something like a mile from her friends, he placed her upon her feet and removed the blanket from her head, taking good care, however, to tie her hands before doing so. She looked around her. A look of bewilderment rested upon her fair young face, as her eyes wandered dreamily over the great unbroken plain that was rendered desolate by the soft light of the great full moon. Not a living creature, save her captor, not a tree nor shrub was visible—not a sound broke the melancholy silence of the place until the savage spoke:

"Does White Dove know where she is?" he asked.

Blanche started at the sound of his voice. She glanced first at his form, then at his painted face, and lastly at his head, that bristled with feathers of a gaudy plumage; but in the outlines of his person she discovered nothing that corresponded with the familiar tone of his voice—a voice which, had she been fully acquainted with the proceedings of the last two hours, she would not have hesitated to confound with the savage form before her, strange though it appeared.

"The White Dove seems frightened," said the savage, seeing the effect his words, first spoken, produced upon Blanche. "She need have no fear so long as she is the willing captive of Red Wolf; the great Cheyenne chief. He will carry you to the lodges of his people in safety; and there he will make you his wife, and then you will be queen of all his tribe. Your gentle cooing will soothe his heart when oppressed with the duties of his tumultuous life, and—"

"Silence your serpent-tongue, wretch!" interrupted Blanche, with an indignant flash of her eyes. Through the savage's voice she had made a startling discovery, which set at defiance all her previous fears; yet, through the bitter indignation and scorn that rankled in her heart, she allowed not the least sign to betray her suspicion to the savage chief, Red Wolf.

"Waugh!" said the Indian, "the White Dove must not croak like the raven. The raven is not a bird to mate with Red Wolf."

"Nor is Red Wolf fit to mate with any but the carrion crow," defiantly returned Blanche,

all the gentle tenderness of her features relaxing into stern rigidity.

"Oh, my pretty dove must not flutter so fiercely, or I will have to clip her wings."

"You threaten a helpless woman, do you, wretch?"

"Waugh! a helpless woman must not trifle with the anger and wishes of an Indian."

"An—Indian!" hissed Blanche, scornfully. "What is an Indian more than a human beast? and what is a—"

She did not finish the sentence upon her tongue's end. By a mighty effort of self-control, she forced back the words that would have betrayed the discovery that she had made to her savage captor.

"Why does not the White Dove speak on? Are her feathers beginning to droop?" asked the chief, with a taunting leer upon his face.

Blanche made no reply, but had she possessed the use of her hands at that moment, she would have drawn her concealed revolver and shot the wretch dead. As it was, however, she determined she would not reply to or heed his vile threats again, as it only induced him to mock her helplessness.

"My pretty dove must not grow contrary to the will of her king," said the chief. "Prettier scalps than yours ornament the lodge of Red Wolf."

Blanche shuddered, and turned her back upon the monster to hide the emotion of horror that surged across her brain. As she did so, she caught sight of two horsemen upon the crest of a gentle swell in the prairie, riding swiftly toward them. A mental prayer of thanks to Heaven escaped her lips, for she supposed they were her friends coming to her rescue. The horses she readily recognized as those belonging to her father, yet they were too far off to recognize the riders; but she had no doubt that they were her father and Jake Darle, the guide.

Plainer, each moment, grew the sound of the animals' feet, nearer and nearer they approached, and Blanche St. Ledger turned toward her savage captor to watch, lest he bury a hatchet in her brain, and flee the vengeance of the approaching horsemen. But instead of fear, a cold sardonic leer of triumph rested upon his fiendish face, for he had divined the hopes and thoughts of his captive by her emotions.

"Ha-ha! he-he! Not yet!" he mockingly laughed, so close to her face that his hot breath fanned her cheeks.

Blanche was startled with wonder at his strange manner. And that laugh! how it echoed through her memory! What could he mean by his defiant coldness in the face of approaching danger? The mystery was soon solved. The horsemen drew rein before them. True enough the horses were Arthur St. Ledger's, but the riders—they were hideous-looking savages.

For a moment it seemed that poor Blanche would fall under the blow of this bitter disappointment; but her self-control soon gained the mastery of her depressed spirits, and rallying her courage, she determined to face her enemies calmly and boldly.

After a hurried consultation in the Indian tongue, of which Blanche knew nothing, the two savages dismounted from the stolen animals and gave the reins to the chief, who turned to the captive and said:

"The White Dove must now ride on one of the dead pale-faces' horses. My braves will free her hands and assist her to mount."

"Dead pale-faces' horses!" repeated Blanche to herself, as a pang of sorrow pierced her heart. "My friends all dead? Surely not! I believe the savages are lying, or they would not evince so much uneasiness. They have stolen father's animals, it is true; but I feel confident they drove the savages away. Then mother has made known my absence from the tent, and there is no doubt that at this moment the guide, Jake Darle, and some or all of my friends are in search of me. At least I can hope so."

One of the savages unbound the captive's hands and assisted her to the back of one of the horses. Blanche was a skill equestrienne, and found no difficulty in keeping her seat upon the animal's bare back. The moment her hands were free, Blanche thought of the tiny revolver in her pocket, but the odds were against her, and besides, her hands and arms were weak and nervous from the painful position in which they had been bound. She concluded, therefore, to wait and watch for a more favorable opportunity to attempt her own escape.

After giving his red allies some instructions, Red Wolf mounted the other animal, and tak-

ing the reins of Blanche's, the two set off at a brisk gallop toward the south-east, leaving the two Indians to follow on foot.

After they had ridden some distance, Blanche gazed around them on all sides, and seeing they were quite alone, she mentally said:

"Now is my chance to send a bullet through the villain's head, and may Heaven give me strength for the ordeal!"

CHAPTER VI.

A RETROSPECT—WHO WAS THE MURDERER?

IN one of the loveliest rural districts in the vicinity of St. Louis, Missouri, stood a beautiful residence surrounded by all the luxury that taste and wealth could acquire, and its owner, Arthur St. Ledger, was considered as possessing both.

One pleasant summer day two persons were seated in conversation within the summer-house that stood in the furthest extremity of the beautiful grove that surrounded St. Ledger's residence. One of these persons the reader is already acquainted with: it was Blanche St. Ledger. The other was a young man a few years her senior, and possessing all the attributes of a handsome and noble man.

"Then you will marry me, Blanche, when your father's anger subsides, and when he has had time to learn the true character of George Barker?"

"Yes, dear Gilbert," replied Blanche, "then I will be your wife; but should that time never come, rest assured, Gilbert, you and only you, have my heart. But sooner than obey my father's wish in marrying George Barker, I will take my own life. It will be far better than a life of misery."

"No, no, Blanche," replied Gilbert Brainard, "you must not do so. You will wreck my life, as well as destroy your own. If your father still insists on your marrying Barker, come to me. We can be wedded despite his opposition; and if I am a poor young mechanic, we can live happily together without his aid."

"That's true, Gilbert; I would rather live happy and toil all my days, than live in sorrow and be surrounded by luxury. But I hope time will change my father's stern will toward you, Gilbert—that he will prefer you as my husband to George Barker."

"I hope so, too, dear Blanche, and with this understanding I will be compelled to leave you," said Gilbert, as he arose to depart.

"Oh, Gilbert!" sighed Blanche, with tears in her eyes, "it seems as though we were about to part forever."

"Nothing but death will do it, Blanche," said he, as he bent over and kissed her warm lips, then turned and hurried away.

Scarcely was Gilbert Brainard out of sight when the foliage behind Blanche was parted, and a man stepped out and stood by her side. It was George Barker, a tall, dark-eyed, dark-haired, evil-expressed looking individual, of some thirty years.

Blanche started with an expression of scorn on her face, when she saw who the intruder was.

"You here, George Barker?" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"And why not, my dear Miss St. Ledger," he returned, with a sneer. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Yes—out of my sight. I hate you, and I bid you leave me!" she haughtily replied.

"Not so cruel, my little Blanche. I have just come from an interview with your good papa, who has given his consent to our union; and now I want you to set the day, my dear, for the happy ceremony that will make us one flesh."

"Never—never will I marry you, George Barker! I love but one, and him I will marry, despite you and all the powers of earth!"

"Then in your own emphatic language, Miss Blanche, I will say: Never—never shall you marry Gilbert Brainard!" and, with a fearful oath, Barker turned on his heel and walked away.

With a troubled heart, Blanche went into the house and sought her father in the library for consolation. She made known her grief to her parent with all the confidence of childish simplicity. But he was a stern and hard-hearted man. He bade her dismiss Gilbert Brainard from her mind forever, for he declared that she should marry Barker. He cared nothing for his child's happiness, only the reputed gold of George Barker was the object of his mind's eye now; he was deaf to all other protestations.

Finding no sympathy in her father's heart, poor Blanche sought the solitude of her own room. Her mother and brother were absent from home on a visit to friends in the East, so

there were no others to whom she could confide the troubles of her soul.

Slowly the day wore away, and night came on. Blanche retired early to bed, but not to sleep. Hour after hour passed on with leaden feet to the poor girl. She could not sleep, nor did she weep, but a feeling of vague horror rested upon her heart. Suddenly, as the clock in the room below chimed out the hour of twelve, she was startled by calls for help and the cry of murder, issuing from her father's bedchamber.

Springing from her bed in a paroxysm of terror, she rushed from her room, in her night-robe—down stairs—along the hall—into her father's bedchamber, where a sight of horror met her view.

Upon his bed, pale and motionless as a corpse, lay Arthur St. Ledger, with his life-blood flowing from a terrible gash on the head and one on his right side. Already the snowy pillows and sheets were streaked and dyed with the crimson tide; and all this sight of horror Blanche witnessed by the light of the moon that shone in through the open window.

With her face as white as the spotless robe she wore, Blanche rushed into the hall and gave a piercing shriek to arouse the servants. In a few moments several of them stood by the bedside of their master. A surgeon was summoned and upon examination, it was found that life was not entirely extinct. The wounds were speedily dressed and stimulants applied to rekindle the vital spark that remained in the body of Arthur St. Ledger. He did recover, however, but it was many long weary weeks of suffering ere he could be nursed back to consciousness. During his illness, the great question that agitated the public mind was, "Who attempted the murder?"

Suspicion hinted plainly at George Barker; but there was no evidence to convict him, so he was released from arrest; and so the matter was allowed to rest until Mr. St. Ledger recovered. Then to the surprise of all, he stated that he recognized his would-be assassin, when he attacked him, as Gilbert Brainard.

The officers of the law were at once set upon Brainard's track, but by some means he got wind of the accusation made against him by St. Ledger, and fled the country, and after several weeks' fruitless efforts, the search for him was relinquished.

During the illness of Mr. St. Ledger, the true character of George Barker naturally betrayed itself. It was found that he was a penniless adventurer, instead of a wealthy gentleman in search of a home in the West, as rumored.

Of course, this news to St. Ledger naturally placed a barrier between Barker and his daughter, and he obstinately refused to have any further intercourse with the penniless George; so after awhile, the latter gentleman pulled up stakes and left for parts unknown, not, however, before seeking revenge on St. Ledger by attempting to fire his barn, after having appropriated one of his fastest horses for his own purpose in facilitating his flight.

During the latter part of the same year, a promising speculation was offered to Arthur St. Ledger; and eager to invest therein, he mortgaged all his personal property and real estate to raise the necessary money. But, alas! the dazzling speculation proved a complete failure, and the total bankruptcy of St. Ledger. The mortgage was closed on land and property and left him almost penniless.

This great loss of his home, produced a great change in the life of Arthur St. Ledger. His proud, iron will was completely broken. His hard, selfish heart was softened down to the same warm and congenial temperature of his duty-loving wife's. He sought enjoyment in the bosom of his little family instead of the outer world; and was a happier man in his poverty than in his wealth. But his spirit was restless. His mind became attracted by the hidden wealth of the Pacific's shores, and the summer following his great loss, we find him pushing westward with his family toward the land of gold. His journey had been one of unmolested and romantic enjoyment, despite the dangers that beset the way, until the night that we meet them on the banks of the Platte river. What befell them there the reader already knows; and with this brief retrospection, we will take up the main thread of our story again.

CHAPTER VII.

A HAPPY MEETING.

ON, on, deeper and deeper into the solitude of the great plain, Blanche St. Ledger and her grim captor continued to ride. Not a word passed be-

tween either—not a sound, save the clamping of their animals' feet, broke the silence of that midnight ride. Holding to the rein with one hand, with the other Blanche held her revolver beneath the folds of her dress, ready for instant use whenever she could catch the wily chief off his guard.

mile after mile was passed over, but fatigue was beginning to tell upon the animals, that were unaccustomed to such speed. Blanche, too, began to feel tired with long riding and watching the chief, whose eyes seemed to rest constantly upon her.

Presently, a dark line, like a belt of timber, rose up before them against the western sky. Red Wolf pointed to it and said:

"Look, my White Dove! Do you see that black line resting along the horizon there?"

Blanche made no reply, but clutched her revolver tighter in her hand.

"If you do," continued the chief, "let me inform you that it is a range of the Black Hills, in one of the deepest recesses of which is situated the village of the Cheyenne Indians. Once there, my pretty Dove, and you are forever safe in my power. The village is approached only through a narrow canyon where a score of my braves keep constant watch, and they alone could repel a hundred times their number."

"It seems to me, Mr. Red Wolf," said Blanche, no longer enabled to keep silent, "that you speak English very fluently for an Indian."

"Yes; it all comes of my having a pale-face wife, my little Dove."

"I don't know," replied Blanche. "I have good reason to believe you a white man in disguise."

"Why does my White Dove think so?" he asked.

"Because you talk like a white man; and besides, you are the meanest-looking specimen of the Indian I ever saw."

"Waugh! Red Wolf is a great chief, White Dove."

"I presume so, in carrying off helpless women and children, and stealing horses."

"The White Dove will change her voice when she is in my lodge."

"But you will never see me there, fiend!" she fairly hissed, as she drew her revolver from the folds of her dress, and leveled it at the head of the savage chief, whose face at that moment was turned away.

"My White Dove—" he began, but he never finished the sentence. The revolver that Blanche St. Ledger held cracked, and with a cry of mortal pain, Red Wolf tottered and reeled for a moment upon his animal's back, then clutching wildly at the open air, he rolled like a log to the ground.

Blanche quickly replaced the revolver in her pocket, and seizing the reins of the riderless horse, she whirled their heads and dashed away in an opposite direction from that they had been traveling. As she did so, she glanced back over her shoulder, and to her horror she saw the supposed dead Indian chief stagger to his feet, and start in pursuit of her.

The tiny bullet had only grazed his head, stunning him for a moment, and having recovered from the blow he began raving, cursing and threatening a terrible vengeance on the author of his misfortune.

But Blanche heard none of his savage threats—she was far beyond his reach—each moment doubling the distance between them. Whither she was going she knew not, but her success in escaping from Red Wolf had encouraged her to hope for a speedy deliverance from all dangers.

When the fugitive maiden had placed a mile or more between her and her enemy, she halted to listen and give the horses a few minutes' rest. Far away behind her she discovered a faint rumbling sound, resembling distant thunder. It seemed to grow nearer and plainer each moment, and while Blanche was meditatively considering what it meant, a distant savage yell fell upon ears. Then all was fearfully distinct. Red Wolf had been joined by a band of mounted warriors, and they had been sent in pursuit of her. It was the sound that their animals' feet made upon the ground that she had first heard.

However great had been the maiden's hope, it now seemed utterly crushed. Her horse was almost exhausted, while in all probability those of the Indians were fresh. Her revolver would be of little or no use whatever, against any odds; she was as helpless as an infant, with no possible avenue of escape open to her. But determined to make an effort for life, she galloped on as fast as her jaded animal could travel. Each moment the noise of the pursuers grew louder, and it was evident, from this fact,

that they were fast gaining, although still a mile behind.

As the fugitive sped on over the boundless expanse, she noticed that the country began to grow hilly, with now and then a clump of artemisia bushes, or wild sage, and occasionally a patch of sickly cottonwoods, which induced her to believe she was in close proximity to some stream of water. This belief was soon verified. From the summit of a high bluff she saw, not more than a quarter of a mile distant, a small stream, winding like a silver thread through a narrow valley, bordered on either side by a chain of rugged hills.

Dashing down the face of the almost perpendicular bluff, Blanche soon found herself in the valley. A yell from behind startled her with renewed fear. Looking back, she saw on the summit of the bluff, outlined against the sky, a dozen or more mounted Indians. And oh, blessed sight! At this moment, as she swept around the base of the bluff, the light of a camp-fire in the center of a small grove flashed before her. Within the circle of light she saw the solitary figure of a white man, dressed in a hunter's garb, leaning on a long rifle. To him she would flee for help. As she approached, the sound of the animal's hoofs caught his ear. Bending forward, he shaded his eyes with his hand, and peered out into the gloom beyond the radius of light.

"Help! help! in the name of Heaven! help!" shouted Blanche, in a tone of the most imploring sweetness, mingled with despair.

The hunter grasped his rifle, and started back as though he had been confronted by a ghost. The light shone bright in his face. A cry of joy escaped the fugitive maiden's lips, as she urged her animals forward. She recognized the hunter.

It was Gilbert Brainard!

In a voice of the wildest emotion she cried:

"Gilbert! Gilbert! Oh, my wronged love, it is you!"

Blanche had urged her animal within the circle of light, and it required but a single glance for Gilbert to recognize her features. One bound and he was at her side, and, lifting her from the animal's back, he clasped her in his strong arms and kissed her time and again, to assure himself that all was reality.

"Blanche, my darling, what fate has sent you to me, here in this wilderness of danger?" he asked.

"Danger itself, dear Gilbert," she replied, forgetful of the danger that was momentarily approaching them. "We were on our way to California, and at dusk to-night we camped on the banks of the Platte river. Along in the night we were attacked by Indians, and I was carried off captive by their chief, calling himself Red Wolf. An hour ago I managed to escape with both the horses stolen by them from our camp; but at this moment, Gilbert, the chief and several mounted warriors are in pursuit of me."

"Yes, I hear them now—they have discovered this fire—your horses will aid us too."

"No, Gilbert, they are tired out. We can go faster on foot."

"Then we will leave them and cross the river. I have a canoe close at hand. Come, they are almost upon us!" and drawing her arm in his, the two hurried away toward the river.

The country, at this point, presented a wild and rugged appearance. The valley narrowed off almost to the water's edge, and frowning rocks and rugged bluffs, thickly wooded with stunted pine and hemlock-trees, reared their heads a hundred feet above the stream.

"A short way up the stream, Blanche, is a cavern, wherein I have made my home for the last year," said Gilbert. "Once there and we will be safe, for awhile at least; and then we can talk over the last year as connected with our lives."

"Yes, indeed, Gilbert," replied Blanche. "I have much to tell you."

After a few minutes of brisk walking, the lovers halted at the base of an immense rock, whose craggy summit hung far out over the silent waters of the river. Wild vines and bushes mingled together and concealed the face of the rock from view, as well as the yawning mouth of a cavern half-way up the side.

"Yes, fifty feet above us in this rock, my dear, is my home," said Gilbert.

"But how do you get up there?" asked Blanche.

"Two ways—that is, you can get up to it from here, and down to it from the top, and both ways by only a rope-ladder."

"Really, I should think it was a safe place,"

replied Blanche, smiling. "But what puzzles me is, how you ever found the cavern in the first place."

"I didn't find it. An old hunter named Raven, a companion of mine, found it."

"Then you have a companion?"

"Yes; but he's absent now over on the Platte river."

"Oh, I am so glad to hear that you have not been entirely alone."

"In one sense of the word, dear Blanche, I have been alone and miserable ever since the minute you informed me that your father had stated that I was his would-be murderer and begged me to flee. I was alone, because I could not be in your society, and miserable because I was looked upon as a murderer. I was always afraid public opinion would influence your mind against me, and that you would discard my love for another's. Had it not been your wish for me to conceal myself, in hopes that the real criminal would be brought to justice, I would have given myself up to the law and taken my chances for life, knowing that I was innocent of the crime. But altering the subject, what induced your father to start to California? And what has become of my friend, George Barker?"

"To your first question, I will say, total bankruptcy; and to your other, George Barker was soon found out to be a penniless adventurer, and having stolen a horse from father, he fled the country, and I never heard of him again until to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes, dear Gilbert, the Indian chief, Red Wolf, in whose power I was to-night—he who carried me from my mother's side, was none other than George Barker in disguise."

"Heavens! then you will be hunted down by the villain and his savages. We must lose no time in ascending to the cave. He can not reach you there. Come."

Turning aside, Gilbert parted some bushes, and revealed the foot of the rope-ladder, which he instructed her how to climb with ease and safety.

"At the top of the ladder," he said, "is a wide table-rock; when you reach it you will drop a pebble in the river, and then I will follow. The mouth of the cavern opens on the table-rock, and is screened by wild vines. Go, my dear, and may Heaven give you strength and courage for the perilous ascent."

Withdrawing her arm from Gilbert's, Blanche caught hold of the ladder, and began the ascent swiftly and fearlessly. Gilbert could not see her, for she was hidden by the bushes and trailing vines, but he could hear the sound each step produced vibrated along the ladder. Presently all became silent and then he knew she had reached the table-rock. A moment later and he heard a pebble drop into the river, and then he began his ascent, with an ease and swiftness that could have been acquired only through much practice, and careful experience.

In a moment's time he was safely landed upon the table-rock; but where was Blanche? She was nowhere to be seen or heard.

"She must have gone in here to give me a little scare—just like the little rogue used to," he mused, smilingly, as he moved toward the mouth of the cavern, but ere he could reach it, two dark figures sprung from the shadow of the rock, and seizing him roughly, bore him to the ground and pinioned his arms before he could offer the least resistance.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SUDDEN REAPPEARANCE.

TEDDY MULDOON was the first to discover the danger that menaced Wild Raven from the two savages that had so suddenly glided from around the island and having called his friend's notice to the fact, he raised his rifle and would have fired at the red-skins, had Harry St. Ledger not checked him with the information that they were far beyond range of his gun—being over three hundred yards away.

For a moment the emigrants were paralyzed with fear for the scout's life. From where they were they could render him no assistance, whatever; and to attempt to get within range of them, the savages would discover them, and in all probability hasten the death of their friend, and escape to the opposite shore. But ere they had much time for thought, they saw Wild Raven spring to his feet, and simultaneous with the crack of the savage's rifle, saw him drop from his canoe into the river and disappear beneath the waves.

"Och, be the holy Vargin!" exclaimed Teddy, in a tone of great emotion, "there goes both

man and pipe. May the devil git the rhed murthering spalpeens!"

"Great heavens, yes!" replied St. Ledger, "our friend is killed. Keep silent, or the savages will bring death upon us next!"

"But can't we defend ourselves against them two, father?" asked Harry.

"Yes; but if they see us, they will hurry and bring others down upon us," the father very sensibly replied.

"But what are we to do, Arthur? our things are all on the island; the scout is dead, and our poor child, God knows where she is," said Mrs. St. Ledger, in a voice of the deepest sorrow.

"Let us hope for the best, Sarah," replied the husband, consolingly; "when the Indians leave here we will manage some way to get to the island, and then some of us go in search of Blanche."

The emigrants, from their concealment, watched the savages, who, the moment Wild Raven fell into the river, drew their knives—drove the canoe forward, eager in their wild excitement to tear the scalp from the scout's head the moment he arose to the surface. But to their disappointment the body of their great enemy arose not. They looked behind, on each side—watched every bubble with a hopeful gleam in their small, serpent-like eyes, even glanced toward the shores and the island to make sure he had not escaped alive by swimming under the water—but not a trace of him, dead or alive, could they discover. Triumph, excitement, wonder and disappointment were depicted upon their savage features as they gazed inquiringly into each other's faces. To them no victory was gained, even had they known certain the scout was dead. To the American Indian, the victory over an enemy consists in securing his scalp. Wild in their disappointment as they were a few moments previous in their triumph, the two savages gave up their search for Raven's body and headed their canoe toward the point where Arthur St. Ledger and his friends were concealed.

"Easy, my friends!" cautioned the elder St. Ledger; "they are coming. Make ready, and the moment they are within reach, fire upon them. I will take the one at the oars."

"Och, and be the howly saints!" exclaimed Teddy, "and their death-cry will be music on the air, the bloody spalpeens."

Closer and closer approached the canoe with its doomed occupants. The dip and swash of the oars grew plainer and plainer, and the waves chafe the shore with a sullen rebound of their murmurings. Suddenly, while the canoe is yet a few feet from the shore, the report of our friends' rifles ring out, and louder rings the death-cry of the two Indians as they spring to their feet and reel and totter and fall into the river.

No shout of triumph escaped the emigrants' lips; their hearts were mute with the loss of their friend, the scout; only that painful death-cry of the savages spoke their triumph.

For a moment the smoke from their rifles hung between them and the victims of their aim like a blue mist. When it cleared away, each face became blanched to an ashy whiteness, each form seemed changed to a statue of marble.

Within the very canoe from which the savages had fallen, sat Wild Raven with two reeking scalps in his hand!

"Oh, howly Mother, preserve us!" exclaimed Teddy, startled with sudden terror. "The devil himself—ole Satan is ather us in the skin of poor, dead Mither Raven!"

"Ha! ha! ha! Sich is life on the plains, frien's," laughed the scout, holding up the reeking scalps, forgetful in his triumph that they were presented to female eyes.

At the sound of the scout's voice, the emigrants recovered from their sudden stupor and fright. There was no doubt now, it was the scout in spirit and flesh, well and unharmed, with the scalps of the two Indians who had sought for his a few minutes previous.

"Och, bedad, and it's Mither Raven himself!" exclaimed the Irishman, ever on time for the first word, "bad 'cess to the rhed, murthering h'athens, yer most riverend honor."

"Ho, good friend, you are safe, thank God," said the elder St. Ledger, advancing closer to the shore.

"Yes, with the exception of that," replied the scout, placing the tip of his finger upon a blood-red welt upon the side of his face, where the savage's bullet had grazed it when he plunged into the river. "I say, friends, it war a clever trick I played on them reds."

"It seems to have been, though we are entirely ignorant of the way in which it was accomplished," replied St. Ledger.

"Oh, wal, I'll explain," said the scout, driv-

ing the canoe to the shore with a single stroke of the oars. "You see, as the reds didn't kill me, I plunged into the river, and havin' previously measured the distance between me and the savages with my eyes, I swam under the water toward them and managed to poke my head out directly under the prow of their canoe, which, you see, is rounded at the extremities and kind o' flarin' at the top like a bell, so the rim projected out over my head and hid it from view; and while the reds were lookin' around, I war under their canoe, holdin' on to the bottom o' it. Soon as the two gents died with a sudden rush o' blood to the brain, I slipped into their canoe, and securin' one o' their knives, lifted their hair in a systummatical style, and here I am, good for another century's work."

The emigrants complimented the scout highly on his success in outwitting the red-skins, and expressed their regret of their inability to compensate him for the risks he was running in their behalf.

In a few minutes Wild Raven recovered the large canoe and conveyed his friends safely over to the island. A spot of a few feet square was cleared of the underbrush in the center of the island for a camp, and all their articles placed there. The place was an admirable one to guard against surprise by a lurking enemy, for while they were completely screened from view of any person upon either shore, that person could be easily seen by them.

The scout instructed Harry St. Ledger how he could obtain fish from an eddy at the lower side of the island by a peculiar process, which would enable them to procure food without leaving the island. He also instructed the elder St. Ledger in the manner he should adopt in guarding against a surprise in the night, and in the many cunning devices the Indians would probably employ to entrap them unawares; and having seen to their comfort in general, Wild Raven took his departure in search of Blanche, obstinately refusing the company of any of the emigrants.

The scout instinctively supposed that Blanche had been carried off on one of her father's horses, and that her abductor had appropriated the other. Actuated by this supposition, he struck the animals' trail, and set off to follow it. The impressions of the iron-shod hoofs were deep in the yielding soil upon the plain, despite the resistance of the grass, which immediately regained its upright position after being trodden down.

As he had expected, the trail lay in the direction of the Black Hills, and as it was easily followed, the scout moved on with long and rapid strides. That he was now in his element could be easily seen from the unusual glow upon his face, and the brilliant gleam in his eyes. One arm was swung over the end of his long rifle that rested upon his shoulders, while in the other hand he carried his cap, or rather swung it back and forth, now and then giving himself an impatient rap upon the leg with it, as if to give emphasis to some mental resolution.

It was toward the middle of the afternoon that Raven came to a point where the trail presented a different aspect. With another party of horsemen that had come from the west, the two that he had been following turned abruptly to the left and proceeded eastward. In the vicinity of the angle, blood was discovered upon the grass, and for once the scout was totally at a loss to understand the cause, not only of the appearance of the blood there, but the abrupt change in the course.

"Painters and polars! this gits me," he muttered, as he rested his chin upon his hands that were clasped over the muzzle of his rifle. "Who it war that came from the west, and why it is that they all go east together, is the question. It might be that those who come from the west war a party o' mounted trappers or hunters, and have rescued the gal; but that's hardly probable, or they'd have taken her back to her frien's. Howsomever, I'll follow on and look into the matter more carefully."

So saying, he drew his cap down in front—which act denoted his perplexity—shouldered his rifle, and moved briskly forward upon the new trail.

CHAPTER IX.

A TERRIBLE MOMENT.

It required but a single glance for Gilbert Brainard to see that he was in the power of two savages, while his ears were greeted by the voices of several others that were in the cavern. He had been caught in his own retreat. The savages had watched him, and learned by what means he had reached the cavern; and then, when he was absent, they ascended the rope

ladder and hid themselves away in the cavern until his return.

To offer resistance, Gilbert knew was folly, for a single effort might provoke the savages to hurl him from the table-rock into the chasm below, or bury a tomahawk in his brain; so he allowed them to bind him without a struggle, though in his submissive demeanor, he showed no humiliation of spirit.

Having securely bound him, hand and foot, the savages carried him into the cavern, and placed him upon the ground.

A fire was burning in the center of the cavern, its light piercing the gloom of the remotest corner of the spacious chamber. Weird and fantastic figures of light danced and shifted upon the walls that had been niched and fluted by the gradual wear of ages. Overhead, the many pendent stalactites pointed down from the great dome like so many fingers of fire, and large stalagmites with points like crystal rose up around like miniature light-houses. At the further end of the cavern, where the wall was less scarped and fluted, could be seen petrifications of lizards and other reptiles, which, as the light shifted over them, seemed aquiver with life. There, too, a tiny cascade poured down in ribbons of foam, and as it caught the reflected rays of light, presented the appearance of the rainbow in all its grandeur and variegated beauty.

Almost the first object that met Gilbert's eyes, was Blanche St. Ledger, sitting on the opposite side of the fire, with her hands tied behind her back, while at her side and around the fire stood half a dozen grim and stalwart Indians. No look of pain nor fear rested upon her pretty face, but her eyes moistened with tears when they met those of her lover.

"Your safe retreat proved to be one of danger, Gilbert," she said, in a mournful voice.

"Yes, dear Blanche; but don't give way to sorrow," he replied, consolingly. "There is hope as long as there is life."

"That is true—"

"Ugh! pale face must quit talk. Cut tongue out if don't," threatened a brawny savage, as he unsheathed a long scalping-knife, as if to give force to his words.

Thus being refused the privilege to converse with one another, by their captors, there was no alternative but to obey.

After a few moments of perfect silence, broken only by the voice of the little cascade, the red-skins gathered around the fire, and lighting their pipes, began to converse, now and then casting a glance toward the prisoners, who were well convinced, thereby, that they were the subject of their conversation.

All of a sudden a wild yell from the savage that was standing on guard at the mouth of the cavern rung through the rocky vault, echoing and re-echoing from chamber to chamber with a hollow sound. The savages around the fire sprang to their feet, and, leaving the prisoners, hurried to the entrance. A yell from the chasm below greeted their exit on the table-rock. Another party of savages had arrived.

The captives, who had taken advantage of the savages' absence to converse in a low tone, were thrilled with horror as they recognized a voice among the new-comers. It was that of the chief, Red Wolf, or, as the reader already knows, George Barker, in disguise.

A look of hopelessness and despair now mantled the face of Blanche, though she did her utmost to keep up her courage. She knew that the demon of Barker's soul was aroused within him against her—that the chains of her captivity were momentarily tightening about her.

"Oh, Gilbert! Gilbert!" she sobbed, clasping her hands tightly over her breast, "there is no hope for us now!"

The sound of approaching footsteps prevented Gilbert from replying. Red Wolf, or George Barker, as we will hereafter call him, and his party of savages had climbed the ladder, and were entering the cave. In a moment they were before the captives, and Barker, with a demoniac leer upon his face, confronted Blanche.

"Ho, ho, my pretty dear," he tauntingly exclaimed, "so I have you again. That was a nice, clever trick, you played me out on the prairie; aren't you sorry about it, now?"

"Sorry!" exclaimed Blanche, with an indignant flashing of her eyes, and a scornful curl of lips; "sorry? Yes, George Barker, I am sorry—sorry that the shot did not kill you!"

"Heigh-eigh! then you *do* know your old sweetheart, despite my pretty disguise?" the villain asked. "Why, when we went a-masquerading over the prairies to-night, I supposed you considered me a genuine Indian."

"I knew you from the first, wretch," replied the maiden, with all the fire of her soul aroused. "A villain, thief, liar and murderer like you can not disguise himself. Your meanness and heathen principles are stamped upon every feature of your face that paint will not hide!"

"Whew! You possess all your old-time fire, my pretty Dove," he said, advancing toward her, "and for fear you should make another ugly scratch like that," pointing to a fresh and bloody wound upon the side of his head, "I will relieve you of your weapon."

He stopped and took the revolver from the maiden's pocket, and, as he turned to examine it by the fire, his eyes met those of Gilbert Brainard. For a moment the villain's soul seemed to shrink with terror from the earnest gaze of the captive's flashing eyes; then, when he saw that Gilbert was helpless, his cowardly bravado returned.

"Fates and furies! if here isn't Mr. Gilbert Brainard, my old rival; a fugitive from justice, a would-be murderer. Ho-ho, my Dove," turning to Blanche, "vengeance is sweet! To-morrow I shall have your sentimental lover executed for the attempted murder of your father. You know it is justice to whom justice is due. Crime must not go unpunished."

"It *does*," hissed Gilbert, "or else you would have been hung long ago, fiend incarnate!"

"Tongue-thrusts, Mr. Brainard, do not hurt—"

"A coward!" interrupted Gilbert.

"Have it your own way, Mr. Brainard, for I will give you only until to-morrow evening to say what you have to say, and settle your earthly matters," said Barker, as he bent his head to examine the revolver.

Neither of the captives made any further reply to the cowardly taunts and threats of the renegade chief; and, after a while, Blanche laid down upon a bed of furs to rest. Oh! could she have conversed with Gilbert! His voice, always full of love and hope, would have fallen like oil upon the tossed waters of her soul. She felt in hopes her friends would come to their rescue, but those hopes would soon vanish, when the troubled reflections of her mind would picture them all dead—lying with pale and ghastly faces upturned in the moonlight where she had last seen them on the Platte river.

After some parley, all the savages, except two that were stationed at the entrance as guards, including Barker, stretched themselves in various attitudes about the fire, and sunk into a sound sleep.

With the first streaks of the morning light, all were astir. A supply of fresh venison was brought in and roasted for breakfast, the captors sharing with their captives in the meal.

It was toward the middle of the afternoon that the savages began making preparations to leave the cavern. As the captives could not be trusted to climb up the top ladder, from the mouth of the cave to the main rock alone, ropes were constructed by which to draw them up, by fastening one end around their waists. As the removal from the cavern occupied an hour or more, it was well on toward evening ere they set off on the journey up the river. The country as they advanced, grew more rugged and mountainous. Deep gorges and yawning chasms intercepted their way at every few steps. Everywhere the silvery voice of cascades could be heard, mingled with the rush and roar of the river, as it swept wildly through some dark canyon hundreds of feet below.

Presently the party came to a halt at a point where two gigantic, scarped and fluted rocks, a hundred feet high, lacked but a few feet of forming a natural bridge over the deep-blue waters of the river. A gloomy and desolate silence seemed to pervade the atmosphere of the place—the dense foliage of the stunted pines shutting out every ray of the sun. A silence, analogous to the place, came over the savages; they spoke only in a low tone, and glanced warily about them with superstitious awe. Some dark legend was connected with the place, and it was only in obedience to their renegade chief that the savages did not flee away from it. Barker took Blanche by the hand, and leading her to the edge of the precipice, bade her look on the depths below.

To satisfy her own curiosity she did so. A yawning chasm, black as a wolf's mouth, was presented to her view; and dizzy with the sight, she sprang back with an exclamation of surprise.

"How would you like to hang, head downward, over the chasm, my dear?" asked Barker, with a fiendish leer.

"I wouldn't like it very well, though I'm certain I would not turn my hand to aid you,

were you suspended there," she replied, haughtily.

"I presume not, my dear; nevertheless, it is the fate I have fixed upon for Gilbert Brainard," he said, slowly; and turning to Gilbert he continued: "And now, young man, my time for revenge on both you and Arthur St. Ledger has come. You shall die, while I live to enjoy the blessings of life. Revenge is sweet, and, in fact, I have been enjoying it for over a year, for it was I who attempted to kill St. Ledger and fix the crime upon you! In the first, I failed, in the latter I was successful, thereby forcing you to flee from the law of your country."

"Ah, villain! I always knew it was you who attempted to take the life of Arthur St. Ledger," said Gilbert, reproachfully; "but mind, murder will out."

"Really, I have just confessed my guilt of the little affair, but then, you see, I am beyond the reach of justice now. But we are losing time." And turning to his savages, he ordered them to bind Gilbert's hands at his side in such a manner that he could not move them. This done, a long rope was fastened to his feet, and then he was dragged to the edge of the precipice. No fear of death blanched the young man's face; not a muscle relaxed in its strength. He asked not for mercy from his enemies, for he knew there was no mercy in their hearts.

Not so with Blanche. She, poor thing, in the wildest despair, fell upon her knees and implored Barker to save Gilbert. But the human devil laughed a Satanic laugh, and turned away. Overcome with sorrow and despair, she sunk unconscious to the ground.

Gilbert was now lowered, head downward, twenty feet below the edge of the precipice by means of the rope attached to his feet. And there, in that awful, dizzy height, he swung to and fro like a pendulum. He could not struggle nor move a muscle. The blood began to pour from his mouth and nostrils, and trickle down among the green leaves of the trees, that interlaced their boughs over the dark waters of the river. To his downward gaze the chasm grew darker and darker as his eyeballs started from their sockets. Life with Gilbert Brainard was but a momentary object any longer. He had ceased to swing to and fro, and now whirled round and round like a top. All the horror and suffering of an adventurous lifetime seemed compressed into that short space in which he was suspended over the dizzy heights of the precipice by a single thread, as it were.

Supposing him dead, Barker fastened the end of the rope which he held in hand to a tree, and walking to the edge of the rock, he looked down at his victim.

But hark! At that moment the dull report of a rifle came up from the depths of the dark chasm; the rope is cut in twain by a whizzing bullet, and Gilbert Brainard goes whirling down, down, into the silent water of the deep river, eighty feet below!

CHAPTER X.

WHITE PLUME, THE SIOUX.

WHEN Arthur St. Ledger and his friend became safely and comfortably located on the island, and felt that their most imminent danger was over, they realized, with a most poignant sting, the loss of their idolized Blanche; and many and fervent were the prayers of the bereaved to the great Protector, for her safe restoration to them. Since they had received from Teddy a full account of Jake Darle's suspicious actions, and considered them in connection with his desertion, they could come to no other conclusion than that he was in league with the Indians. And yet, they might possibly be mistaken. The guide may have been perfectly innocent of the accusation. The signaling with fire might have been to direct some person that was lost on the plain, and in leaving the camp, it might have been to look after their—the emigrants'—safety, and he unluckily have been captured or murdered by the Indians. But circumstances were very strong against him, and it would require trustworthy evidence to exonerate him from the emigrants' suspicions.

At noon Harry caught several fine trout in the eddy at the lower side of the island, as instructed by Wild Raven. A fire was then struck, the fish dressed and fried to a crisp-brown by Mrs. St. Ledger, whose skill in the culinary art was surpassed by few. A sumptuous dinner of the luscious and savory trout was served, and eaten with great relish. After the table had been cleared away, the fire was put out, so that the smoke might not attract attention from shore.

Teddy, having retained the scout's pipe until his return, now seated himself for a smoke,

while Mr. St. Ledger and his son set about making arrangements for passing the night. Rifles and pistols were carefully examined and loaded, and as it was necessary for two of them to stand guard after dark, a path, making the circuit of the island, was cleared of brush and drifted wood, so that the guards could move with ease and caution.

To the emigrants, in their great anxiety for the safe and speedy return of Blanche, the day wore quickly away and night came on apace. At dark Teddy Muldoon and Harry took their respective stations as guards at opposite points on the island, each one pacing half the circuit of the island and back, starting so that when one was at the upper side the other was at the lower side, thus bringing all points under their vigilance.

The moon was shining brightly, flooding the landscape with light. The shores, with every object that appeared upon them, were plainly outlined, and the river, above and on each side of the island, appeared like a bed of molten silver. It seemed utterly impossible that any creature, however small, could reach the island from either shore without being discovered by the wary yet inexperienced guards.

In two hours Teddy was relieved from his watch by Mr. St. Ledger, and permitted to take two hours' sleep, when he, in turn would relieve Harry. The moment, almost, that the Irishman touched his head to the ground, he fell asleep, and slept soundly until he was aroused by Harry. Very reluctantly he arose and began pacing sluggishly to and fro upon his watch, rubbing his half-open eyes with both hands, and mumbling:

"Botheration! If this getting up in the middle of a nap isn't like tearing one's heart-strings out, just tell me av it! Begorra, I've a notion to shlaape a leetle on me post, come to think av it. I'm sure there's no Ingins within a mile av—"

"Ugh!"

It was a low, guttural sound that greeted his ear, and a heavy hand that he felt upon his shoulder.

"Tormint yees, Harry—" But it was not Harry; it was a large, muscular-looking savage that confronted the Irishman.

"Me friend; me White Plume," said the Indian, as Teddy stepped back and raised his rifle.

There was such a strange fascination in the savage's voice, that it caused Teddy to lower his rifle and look closely into his face, which, like no others he had ever seen, was devoid of paint. He was tall and powerfully built, with a broad, honest oval face, and clear black eyes, that were free from that cunning and serpent-like light so peculiar to his race. His head, large, well-defined and intellectual, was covered with long, glossy hair and surmounted with a snow-white eagle-plume. He carried a knife at his waist and a bow and quiver at his back. His clothes, which sat close to his muscular limbs and chest, were dripping wet, showing that he had been in the river.

"Faith, Misther White Plume," said Teddy, scratching his head with a quizzical expression on his face, "have yees anything to show that yees are a friend?"

"Nothing but word," replied White Plume.

"Yes; but how do me's know whether yees tell the truth?"

"Trust me," said the Indian.

"What's the matter, Teddy?" called Mr. St. Ledger, hearing the Irishman's voice in conversation.

"Faith, and I've a big rhed Inging around here."

"A—what?"

"Come rhound, yer honor, and see."

In a moment St. Ledger was in the presence of Teddy and the Indian. A conversation immediately sprung up, in which Mr. St. Ledger became fully convinced that White Plume was a friendly Indian, and invited him to their camp.

"What brought you here at this time of night, White Plume?" asked St. Ledger, after having a fire struck, that he might get a better view of the pretended friendly Indian.

"Come," said White Plume, "to bring white squaw."

"Where is she?"

"There," and he pointed toward the shore.

"Is she a captive?" asked Mrs. St. Ledger, as she thought of Blanche.

"She was, for five long summers, but free now. Me take her here and wait till father git her," replied the Indian, thoughtfully.

"Where is her father?"

"He comin'," said the Indian, evasively, as he took an arrow from his quiver and thrust the point in the fire.

"What's that for?" asked St. Ledger, suddenly growing suspicious.

The Indian made no reply, but stooping, he plucked the blazing arrow from the fire, and applying it to his bow-string, he sent it whirling up into the air, far above the tree-tops.

"Treachery!" cried St. Ledger. "He has signaled to his friends!" and the click of three rifles was heard.

"No," said the Indian, laughing, "me tell Rena to come. See!" and he pointed out toward the west shore.

The emigrants, half ashamed of their hasty act, lowered their rifles and looked in the direction indicated. Out from the shadow of the bank they saw a tiny canoe, with a tiny occupant, dart like a bird—the paddles flashing in the moonlight like snow-white wings. But hark! Clear as the warbling lay of the lark—sweet and mournful as the wild strains of an Eolian harp—the voice of that canoe's tiny occupant floats over the water to the ears of our friends, as she trills:

"Wild roved an Indian girl,
Sweet Alfaretta,
Where sweeps the waters of
The blue Juniata."

in plaintive cadence. The Voice was purely Saxon, and there was no doubt, now, as to White Plume's truthfulness.

In a few moments the canoe had reached the island, and springing ashore, the maiden parted the bushes and advanced shy as a plover, to the side of White Plume.

She could not have been more than sixteen summers of age, was small, yet fully developed in form and features, and as quick and graceful as the timid fawn. Her features, though bronzed by exposure to the sun and wind, were as fine and regular as those of a sculptured Madonna; her eyes were large, black and mournful, and looked at you with a holy light shining from their depths with sweet and tender fascination.

She was dressed in a short frock of some green material, bound round the skirts with yellow fringe, while her feet and limbs were incased in beaded moccasins and buckskin leggings. Around her neck and waist were innumerable strands of white beads and tiny pink shells that flashed like opals in the fire-light.

The maiden's eyes wandered softly from one of the emigrants to the other, until finally they rested upon Mrs. St. Ledger, with a gentle, childlike adoration.

"What is your name, my little lady?" asked Mrs. St. Ledger, advancing and patting her under the chin.

"Rena," replied the maiden, in a clear, musical voice.

"Rena," repeated the good woman; "that is a pretty name, but haven't you another name? Rena who?"

The maiden was about to speak when White Plume placed his finger to his lips, enjoining silence. Mrs. St. Ledger saw him, and read the meaning of his gesture, and at once changed the subject which the Indian wanted to remain secret.

"You are tired, Rena," she said, turning toward the tent; come with me into my tent and rest."

Rena followed her into the tent, and having seated themselves on a pile of blankets, Mrs. St. Ledger asked:

"Have you traveled far to-day, Rena?"

"Yes, ma'am," she politely replied, "we have come a long ways."

"And where are you going, Rena?"

"Here, to this island."

"You have been a captive, have you, among the Indians?"

"Yes, ma'am; five years ago, papa and mother and White Plume were on this very island, when the Indians came and killed mother and took me and White Plume prisoners, and carried us off to their village. White Plume escaped from them, but I was kept until a few days ago, when he rescued me from their power. He tells me that papa is alive, and is to meet us here in a few days. Oh, I am so anxious to see poor papa!" and the tears arose in her great, mournful eyes.

"What is your papa's name, Rena?" asked Mrs. St. Ledger, as she smoothed the maiden's disheveled ringlets tenderly.

Rena raised her tearful eyes and saw White Plume sitting near the door of the tent, apparently taking no notice of her, but with his finger pressed significantly upon his lips, and turning to Mrs. St. Ledger, she said, sweetly:

"Oh, good lady, please don't ask me that, for I can not tell you papa's name yet."

"Pardon me, Rena," said the good woman,

"for troubling you with so many questions that are painful to you. I have a daughter who is in the hands of the Indians now, and I am in constant trouble about her, and scarcely know what I say half the time. But you are sleepy, and must lie down here with me and rest."

The guards resumed their watch, Harry laid down again to sleep, while White Plume, in true Indian fashion, sat down near the tent and began smoking, blowing the smoke through his nostrils in great whiffs.

Thus an hour passed, in silence, when the Indian arose, and looking into the tent to see that his tender charge was safe and asleep, as he passed, he walked out to where Mr. St. Ledger was, and signified his willingness to take his place. Of course, St. Ledger readily yielded his post to one whose skill and vigilance far exceeded his, and retired to rest. However, he had scarcely fallen into a doze before he was aroused by the friendly red-man, with startling intelligence.

"Ugh! Ingins come, pale-face!"

St. Ledger sprang to his feet and followed White Plume to the upper side of the island, where, parting the undergrowth before them, they scanned the river before and on each side of them. They saw nothing, yet the dip of oars was plainly heard descending the river at no great distance. An abrupt bend in the river hid the unknown voyagers from view.

"How do you know, White Plume, that Indians are coming? It might be friends," said St. Ledger.

"No—not friend," replied the Indian, with a shake of the head; "it enemies—Ingins!"

"But how can you tell? You can't see them."

"No; me hear 'em. Tell by dip of oars. Ugh—there come!"

True enough, as White Plume spoke, a large canoe, with a dozen savages in it, appeared from around the bend, in full view of the two watchers.

The canoe was not more than one hundred yards distant, and whatever was to be done to repel the attack must be done speedily. But the surprise of our friends was somewhat appeased, when all of a sudden they saw the canoe turn at right angles, and move briskly toward the east shore, which, as the reader doubtless remembers, was covered with a light growth of cottonwood and undergrowth, thereby affording good protection to enemies who might feel disposed to lay siege to the island.

"What do they mean by that?" asked St. Ledger, as the canoe disappeared under the shadow of the bank.

White Plume shook his head, gave utterance to two or three guttural exclamations, and then replied:

"Bad Ingins! Mean mischief. Me go steal their canoe, else they make us trouble. Waugh!"

St. Ledger suppressed a smile at the Indian's anger, as he turned and glided back to the tent, peered in, passed on to the lower side of the island and halted at the water's edge. St. Ledger followed him, and in a moment he was at his side.

"What are you going to do, White Plume?"

"Swim to shore—steal bad Ingins' canoe—be back soon—mebby not," and as he concluded, he plunged into the water, and struck out for the shore.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SIOUX STRATAGEM.

WHEN White Plume reached the shore, it was at a point three hundred yards below where the Indian canoe had touched. Crawling up the bank, he moved back into the shadow of the trees, then turned and moved, with cat-like stealth and caution, up the stream.

In a few moments he came within the sound of voices, which he recognized as those of his natural enemies, the Cheyennes, he being a Sioux. Seating himself to watch their movements, and learn from their conversation, if possible, their future intentions, he was suddenly induced to quit his point of observation very unceremoniously. The Cheyennes had struck a light within a feet of him; so selecting another look-out, he was now enabled to make out their number. There were ten grouped around the fire. Their conversation was carried on in a low tone, yet the practiced ears of White Plume drank in every word.

As he had expected, the Cheyennes had laid a plan by which to surprise and capture those on the island, and had he not learned how it was to be accomplished, they would, in all probability, have succeeded. As the attack was not to be made until the latter part of the night,

White Plume had ample time in which to prepare to meet them, besides to carry out the object which he had left the island for, that of stealing their canoe; and in doing so, it would probably defeat all their well-concocted schemes.

So, having learned all he wished to from his ten enemies, the brave Sioux moved back into the timber aways, and then, by a circuitous route, reached the river some distance above the camp. Climbing down the bank into the water, he submerged himself to the chin, and with his hunting-knife between his teeth, he began moving down the stream, keeping well under the shadow of the bank, now and then stopping to listen. So cautiously did he move and breathe, that he seemed an inanimate being, moved only by the sluggish current of the river.

It was several minutes ere White Plume came in sight of the coveted canoe; but what was his disappointment when he did, to find two savages seated in it.

The Sioux was in a dilemma. He could not spring upon the two enemies and put them out of the way without bringing the others upon him; and to try to steal the canoe with two Indians in it was impossible. So he had either to go back without it, or else wait until the savages had left it. He decided upon the latter course, although it might require hours of patience; but that quality the American Indian invariably possesses.

White Plume was determined to have the canoe, or a Cheyenne scalp, and both if it were possible. For one long hour he stood in the water without moving a muscle, watching the two Indians with a dogged determination. It seemed curious to him that they never moved nor spoke a word; surely they were not asleep, and yet it might be possible, he thought, for all they were sitting bolt upright; but that would make no difference; if an Indian wants to, he can sleep just as well sitting or standing as lying down.

White Plume made a slight noise; still the Cheyennes moved not. He advanced to the side of the canoe, and raising himself slightly, he looked in their very faces. Sure enough, they were both sound asleep, with their guns lying at their feet. A smile passed over the Sioux's face as a novel idea entered his mind. He would steal canoe, Indians, scalps and all! The victory would be complete.

The ten Cheyennes on the shore were not more than ten steps away, and it would require some caution, even to escape them; but not to be delayed, White Plume crept to the front end of the canoe, and cut the rope that fastened it to the shore. This done, he pushed it gently out into the river, and then, taking it in tow, set off for the island, swimming with the most extreme caution.

Arthur St. Ledger saw the canoe approaching, and luckily discovered the trick the Sioux was playing on his enemies, in time to prevent Teddy from firing upon them.

The Sioux succeeded in reaching the island with his two sleeping savages, without arousing them from their slumber, but in stepping from the water, he made a light splash which reached their practiced ears. They awoke. But before they could collect their sluggish thoughts, and realize their critical situation, White Plume sprang into the canoe, and seizing a tomahawk that lay at their feet, buried it in their benumbed brains. His double victory was achieved. How soon the ten Cheyennes discovered the loss of their canoe and friends was not known. Even had they made the discovery at all, they were silent in their rage at being thus outwitted by an unknown enemy.

When White Plume rejoined his white friends at the fire, he related the conversation that he had overheard at the Cheyenne camp, of the intended attack upon the island, and cautioned them to be upon their guard; although he thought that the loss of their canoe might frustrate their plans.

The Sioux again resumed his post as guard, not feeling safe in trusting their safety entirely in the hands of the inexperienced whites; yet his own knowledge of savage life was soon brought to a severe test.

Some distance below the island, on the east bank of the river, he discovered a dull light moving to and fro, with a slow and regular motion; sometimes it would remain stationary, then entirely disappear for a moment, and appear in a different place again.

White Plume knew that the moving light was a system of telegraphy among the Indians, but as a general thing, the signals of one tribe were unknown by the others, consequently the

Sioux was unable to read the message that was being communicated to some other point. He looked warily about him in all directions, hoping to learn by a return signal, the location of the party, or individual that the message was intended for, but he could see nothing. But hark! His practiced ears caught a faint ripple in the water, on the west side of the island, and with the silence of a phantom, he glided toward the point. Parting the bushes that skirt the island, he peered out on the river, and to his utmost indignation he beheld, about halfway between the island and the main land, a Cheyenne in the identical canoe that he had stolen an hour before, rowing swiftly toward the shore.

So far as stealing the canoe was concerned, the Sioux felt that he had gained nothing, only in diminishing the number of his enemies. But what was Teddy about, that he had not discovered the Cheyenne before he got beyond their reach? His path in passing to and fro on his guard ran within three steps of the canoe. The Sioux drew back and waited for his approach, and an explanation. But Teddy did not come. A minute—two minutes passed, and still he was absent. The Indian listened for his footsteps, but he heard them not. But from over the river, in the direction of the canoe, came the startling cry:

"Murder! help! help! murder! Howly Vargin!"

It was the voice of Teddy Muldoon.

In a moment Arthur St. Ledger and Harry, aroused from their sleep by the Irishman's cries, were at White Plume's side.

"What is the trouble, White Plume?" asked St. Ledger.

"Ugh! Heap trouble! Look!" commanded the Indian, pointing out toward the canoe, with a cloud of indignation upon his face.

All eyes were upon the canoe in an instant, and in it they beheld Teddy and the Cheyenne engaged in a deadly struggle. How the former got there was a mystery to our friends. They dare not attempt to shoot the Cheyenne, for fear Teddy would prove the victim of their aim; and to attempt to approach them would prove fatal, for several Cheyenne savages were standing upon the bank, within thirty yards of the combatants, watching the struggle.

Loud and sharp rose the cries of the struggling men, as they swayed to and fro with the rocking canoe. Bright flashed their deadly weapons in the moonlight, as they struck quick and wildly at each other. Now they were up, now down upon their knees, then up again swaying to and fro, now reeling over the canoe's side and back again. Now Teddy was uppermost, now the savage. Their strength and dexterity were equal, and only the advantage would determine the contest. This, by superior endurance, the Cheyenne at last was gaining, when all of a sudden, the canoe rocked violently, and the two combatants rolled out into the river!

For a moment they were lost to view beneath the waves, then they arose firmly clinched in each other's grasp, still beating and striking, and yelling as wildly as ever. Again they sink beneath the waves and are seen no more. Our friends watch in breathless anxiety to see them rise again, but their watching was in vain. The empty canoe floated away at the will of the current—the savages on the shore withdrew into the timber, and all became silent again.

With a feeling of sorrow for their lost companion, our friends retired to their camp-fire. Two of their little party were now gone, and dangers seemed momentarily gathering around them—dangers which, despite their vigilance, would crawl as noiseless as a serpent into their midst, and mark their trail with blood.

White Plume now took the entire watch upon himself. He would trust his white friends' inexperience no longer, for he knew that the cunning Cheyennes would make every effort within their power to capture the island, and murder its occupants. Mr. St. Ledger readily yielded to the Sioux's will, for he saw how hopeless would have been their defense of the island were it not for the friendly red-man.

White Plume now fully understood the signal that he had seen down the river, and resolved not to be caught again in the same way, so he crawled up into the highest tree on the island and secreted himself in such a position that he could command a view of the river on all sides.

The night wore slowly away without any further demonstration on the part of Cheyennes. As the last weary star paled away before the glare of the open day, the friendly Sioux descended from his look-out and aroused his friends from their slumber.

Rena, looking greatly refreshed with her rest, chatted with the emigrants quite merrily. She bestowed more than equal attention upon Harry, even in assisting him in catching fish for breakfast.

While Mrs. St. Ledger was engaged in preparing the meal, she suddenly turned to her husband and said:

"Arthur, do you know that we left our iron kettle, one of our best cooking vessels, at the wagon, yesterday?"

"That is true, Sarah, though really, I had not thought of it until you mentioned the fact," replied the husband. "But I presume the savages have it by this time, for the wagon and all with it were left at their mercy."

"Well, we can get along without it, though I would, on account of the old 'fireside' associations connected with it, have liked to keep it," said the matron, with a smile, resuming her labor.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LIFE SHOT.

ARRIVING at the top of the bluff overlooking the narrow valley, and the grove in which Blanche St. Ledger met her lover, Wild Raven halted, and with his eagle-eyes swept the country before him.

Far away to his left, the valley gradually widened into a great plain, while at his right it narrowed off to the river's edge, with mountainous bluffs, pierced by caverns, and cut and diversified by deep gorges, yawning chasms, and roaring canyons.

Here and there, a small grove dotted the valley, and as the scout's eyes rested upon one of these, he saw animals emerge leisurely from its shadow. At first he took them to be buffaloes, but upon examining them with a small spy-glass, which he always carried, he discovered they were horses, which, from the description given him previously, he recognized as those belonging to Arthur St. Ledger. Descending the bluff into the valley, he carefully approached the animals, which at sight of him pricked up their ears and whinnied piteously.

"Wherr, wherr, wherr," whistled the scout, coaxingly.

The animals, with their limbs stiff and swollen from hard riding, hobbled up to the scout and licked his hand and rubbed their noses against him in mute appeal.

"Ah! if you could only speak, ye dumb critters," said the scout, caressing them kindly, "perhaps you could tell me o' them I seek. But go on, crop the grass, and may be I'll come for you again, when your limbs are not stiff. Go-long, go-long, ponies," and he moved on, leaving the noble animals looking after him.

He bent his footsteps toward the grove from which he saw the horses emerge. In a moment he had reached its outskirts and found himself face to face with a tall, powerful savage. A gleam of recognition flashed in their eyes. The savage sprung forward with a low cry, and seizing Wild Raven by the arm dragged him into the shadow of the grove. In a moment a low cry, a savage yell and a shriek resembling that of a female came from the depths of the copse, then all became silent as the grave.

In half an hour Wild Raven appeared on the opposite side of the grove, free and unharmed; but there was no victim's blood upon his hands—no reeking scalp dangled at his belt, but upon his features rested a smile of triumphant joy—such as seemed to agitate his soul with a new-found happiness.

"Now for the cavern," he muttered, as he moved with elastic step up the river. "Oh! if I can just find Gil and the girl there!"

As he hurried on, a smile would now and then pass over his face, or he would check himself from humming an old-time song, only to commence whistling it. Now and then he would turn and glance back toward the grove, then press forward again.

Presently he halted on the bank of the river, just opposite the cavern in which he and Gilbert Brainard made their home. Drawing a small bark canoe from under some willows, he was about stepping into it to cross to the opposite side of the river, when the sound of voices reached his ears, coming from the other shore. Stepping back a ways he parted the willows and looked across. To his horror and surprise he discovered a savage standing on the table-rock in front of the cave, which he supposed was known only to himself and Gilbert Brainard, his companion.

In a moment his rifle was leveled at the savage, but fortunately before he could fire, several other Indians that were in the cavern made their exit on the table-rock, leading Gilbert

Brainard and a young woman whom he knew must be Blanche St. Ledger.

The scout saw the great propriety of keeping his proximity to his enemies a secret, yet a cloud of silent rage overshadowed his features and a light of impatient revenge flashed in his eyes, as he lowered his deadly rifle.

"Oh, curse the devils!" he fairly hissed between his set teeth, "they've found our 'nest' at last, but some of them shall repent it, or I'm no judge of small matters. Ah, they're leavin'."

True, the savages began to ascend the rope ladder to the summit of the rock, drawing the captives up by means of long ropes fastened around their bodies. After all the party was up, the ladder was destroyed, and then they set off up the stream.

"I'll foller them to the end o' creation," muttered the scout, as he stepped into the concealed canoe and headed it up the river.

By using a little caution he was enabled to keep within hearing of the boisterous party, which he knew would follow the course of the river some distance. Only one accustomed to every danger that beset the stream could navigate it at all, but this Wild Raven had often done—he knew the dangers of every canyon through which it rushed, where every sand-bar would compel him to drag his canoe; and with this knowledge he felt no reluctance in ascending the stream.

It was the scout's intention to follow the savages until they encamped for the night, then endeavor to rescue his friends by whatever chance was offered. But alas! this intention was suddenly nipped in the bud when, from the top of a gigantic rock that projected midway over the river, he beheld Gilbert Brainard suspended head downward over the stream.

A speechless horror thrilled the scout's veins. He saw, with distended eyes, his fellow-companion swinging over the awful height, while he was powerless to aid, yet within speaking distance of him. The sight was too much; the scout could not look upon the suffering man, and he turned his eyes away. As he did so, an idea flashed in his mind, and raising his eyes again, he measured, by sight, the distance that intervened between Brainard and the river's surface. It was as much as eighty feet.

"I'll try it," he mused, as he thrust two additional bullets into his rifle. "The fall may kill him, but if it does, then his sufferin' will be over."

As he concluded, he raised his rifle and took a steady aim at the rope by which Gilbert was suspended from the top of the precipice, and fired. True to the mark, the bullet went home. The rope was cut in twain, and down, down came Gilbert Brainard, down through the interlaced boughs of the overhanging trees, down into the river, striking the water, feet downward, and sinking from view.

Wild Raven watched until he rose to the surface again; then, driving his canoe forward, he seized the unconscious form and lifted it from the water.

"Not dead yit, by a long shot," muttered the scout, as he placed his hand on Gilbert's breast and felt his heart throbbing, quick and strong. "Only overcome with terror at his hellish treatment," and placing him in the bottom of the canoe, the scout tore open his shirt and began chafing his breast and temples. In a few moments Gilbert opened his eyes and gazed vacantly about him, like one in a delirium.

"Ho, ho, boy!" spoke the scout; "you're safe, heels down'ards, too."

The voice of Raven acted like an electric shock upon the nerves and senses of the young man. He rose to a sitting posture, looked his preserver in the eyes, and faintly articulated:

"Raven, you have saved me from an awful death."

"So I perceive," the scout replied, as he unfastened that part of the rope which was attached to his feet.

"But how did you reach me at that great height?"

"I shot the rope in two, and you drapped into the river, my boy."

"And the fall did not kill me!"

"Of course it didn't. Don't you see you're alive? Them branches broke the force of your fall, and besides, your feet struck the water first."

"It was a miraculous escape. Wild Raven, and to you I owe my life," said Gilbert, grasping the scout's brawny hand, "but I shall still claim your assistance. A friend of mine, a young woman, is in that accursed renegade chief's power, and I want you to assist me in rescuing her."

"Certainly, my boy, certainly; but is her name St. Ledger?"

"Yes; what do you know about her?"

"It's Blanche St. Ledger that I'm searchin' fur. I left her parents on the Platte, this mornin'."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Gilbert, starting up: "then let us lose no more time here."

"Don't be in a hurry, boy; it'll do ne good. Sit down and tell me what you know about that renegade chief, Red Wolf."

Gilbert sunk back to his seat, weak and nervous from the effects of his late ordeal.

"I know him," he said, "to be a white man with a devil's heart. It was he who fixed the crime of murder upon me, of which I have often spoken to you. The villain admitted his guilt of the murder before he attempted to murder me, a few minutes ago—"

"But his name when you knowed him in the States?"

"George Barker."

"George Barker!" repeated the scout, as a fierce scowl settled over his swarthy face; "and may Heaven spare my life until he is in my power one minute! Then he will suffer, for I will have his heart's blood!"

"Has he ever injured you, Raven, in any way?" asked Gilbert: somewhat surprised at the scout's strange demeanor.

"Never mind that now, lad," replied the scout, evasively: "it's time we were leavin' in search o' Miss St. Ledger. We must get her before Red Wolf reaches his village with her, less we'll never set eyes on her alive."

"Very well," replied Gilbert: "shall we leave the river and follow their trail?"

"Not fur awhile. You are too weak to walk yet, and as the savages are likely to follow the river, we can follow them in the canoe. It's very likely that they'll camp at nightfall, and then will be our time to act."

So saying, the scout headed the canoe upstream, and the pursuit had commenced again.

CHAPTER XIII.

LIFTED INTO LIFE AGAIN.

WHEN Blanche St. Ledger recovered from the swoon into which she had fallen at the moment that Gilbert was swung from the precipice, she found herself in a canoe on a narrow river. Dark, frowning and rugged bluffs rose from the water's edge, excluding every ray of the moon—for night had long since settled over the land—from the deserted valley.

The maiden's first thoughts were of Gilbert Brainard. There were several dark forms sitting in the canoe;—was Gilbert one of them? No, no! the cruel remembrance of his horrible death at the precipice came crowding upon her half-distracted mind with all the excruciating pain of the torture rack. No, no! she could see him, cold and lifeless, while she—worse, far worse than death—was being carried away into endless captivity by his murderer, George Barker, an outcast from civilized society, the meanest of all mean and wicked white men—a white renegade, wearing without shame the insignia of chief among a people whose hearts know nothing of mercy.

And, too, thoughts of her parents and friends being dead weighed heavily upon her heart, that was bleeding her life away through the deep wounds of poignant sorrow. Where, oh where, could she turn now for help? To whom could she flee for words of love and consolation? To whom could she flee for life and happiness? Alas, to whom?

Thoughts of self-destruction were in her mind, but that seemed as impossible as escape from the savages with her life. The eyes of Barker were constantly upon her, noting every movement of her body and every gleam of her eyes.

"But, the time will come!" she mentally exclaimed; "the wretch shall not triumph over my helplessness and sorrow long," and her spirit gathered strength and courage from the resolution.

When Barker saw that Blanche had recovered from her swoon, and had risen to a sitting posture on her pallet of furs, he lost no time in opening a conversation.

"You are feeling better, are you not, Miss St. Ledger?" he asked.

Blanche saw, from the first, that the wretch was aiming to prey upon her sorrow and bring her in humble resignation to his cowardly will; but she resolved to mask her feelings, and show him no humiliation—meet his questions with scorn, and his boasted power with rebuke and defiance.

"Indeed," she replied, "I feel very well."

"Then you enjoy our little ride?" he again asked.

"Very much; the air is so cool and bracing, and then it is not often that one gets a boat-ride with a crew of the noble red-men under such a gallant chief," she answered.

"Really, you flatter me, Miss St. Ledger," Barker replied, in a voice savoring of real sentimentality.

"Flatter you?" she said, sneeringly. "Do you suppose that I would waste words in real flattery on such a miserable outcast as you are, George Barker? Why, one of these savages is more deserving of flattery than you, for, as far as a white man is concerned, you represent him only in form, while the Indians possess a—"

"There, there, that will do," interrupted Barker, his cowardly passion beginning to rise. "I would rather not hear such lectures, especially from my own captive."

"Your own captive!" Blanche fairly hissed, with derision. "You may have occasion to whistle another tune before daylight."

"I'm sure Gilbert Brainard will not be the cause of it," returned Barker, with a fiendish leer upon his face.

The heartless and cowardly taunt cut deep into the captive's troubled breast. Her heart was too painfully stung to reply to the villain. She spoke not, but a sigh of anguish escaped her lips, as she turned her head away, pretending not to hear his tantalizing allusion to her lover; but, the quick ear of the renegade caught the sigh that came from her heart, and he determined to follow up the advantage gained over her rebellious spirit.

"You will, Miss St. Ledger," he continued, "find out that obedience to my commands will save you from all those petty sighs of grief, for I am determined to humiliate your proud spirit. You need not think of escape, for you are within the impenetrable fastnesses of the Black Hills, where no one but my friends dare venture with their lives. And to ease you upon one subject, I will tell you that your parents are alive and well; and I calculate to inform them that you are in my power, so that I can torture them for the way they denounced me when I was honorably aspiring to your hand."

"Oh, I tell you, Miss St. Ledger, revenge is sweet to me! You see, the time was when you were, in one sense, mistress of me; now, I am master of you. Gilbert Brainard stood as an object between us then; now he hangs between two bluffs, an object for the buzzards, and so the world jogs on."

"Indeed!" sneered Blanche, gaining her usual calmness. "Had you lived during the feudal ages you would have made quite a mark."

"Really, I am making quite a mark in this modern age. The name of Red Wolf is pretty extensively known throughout the West, as a great warrior and terrible avenger, and woe, woe to the man that crosses my path or runs counter to my will. You are not the first captive, Miss Blanche, by a long ways, nor do I suppose you will be the last one. Five years ago a great, double-fisted wretch had the impudence to knock me—Red Wolf, chief of the Cheyenne nation—down, for ordering him to leave our hunting-grounds—"

"He served you just right," said Blanche, indignantly.

"You think so, of course, but I didn't, and to cut a long story short, I will just say that the glossy scalp-locks of his high-spirited little wife hang in my lodge, and that his daughter, who is now budding into womanhood, is a captive in my village. The man, whose name I never learned, escaped my fingers, and I presume is living yet, if he hasn't died with torture. At least, if he be living, I hope he knows that I have his daughter in my power, and intend to make her my wife some day. She will be your companion until we are married."

"Indeed!" replied Blanche, with an inward shudder of terror; "what is your other captive's name?"

"Rena is all the name she would ever tell me, though I have coaxed, threatened, and even promised her her liberty if she would tell me, but to no purpose; she is stubborn as a mule. However, Rena is all the same without any other name."

Blanche made no reply to the renegade's remarks—in fact she did not hear them, for her whole soul was absorbed in watching a dark figure moving along the shore some distance in rear of the canoe. That it was a man, there was no doubt, but the form was so deeply blended with the darkness that she could not tell whether it was that of a savage or white man, or only imagination.

The boat moved on as fast as possible against the resistful current of the stream, and still Blanche saw the shadow following after; but

presently it came closer, and finally passed on in advance of the canoe, so that she was compelled to turn her head in order to watch it. But fearing that she might arouse some suspicion by thus watching with her head turned, she feigned an excuse that her position was painful, and was allowed to change it so that she could see ahead.

To her wonder, she saw the figure not once after she had changed her position. It had vanished and left her as helpless as ever, with an additional feeling of a vague presentiment of some new terror resting upon her mind.

In watching the reappearance of the mysterious figure, Blanche saw, at the distance of one hundred yards, a point where the river seemed to abruptly end, or flow from a dark cavern; but as they neared the point she found that she was mistaken in both cases—that two rocks of immense size arose up on either side of and jutting out over the river, lacking but a few feet of forming a natural bridge. As she sat with her eyes upon the rock, Blanche discovered a dark object upon it moving athwart the sky, but before she could take a second glance, their near approach brought the lower side of the rock between her and the object. In another moment they were beneath the rock, moving through the dark, tunnel-like passage, damp and dismal as that of a subterranean river.

They were about half-way through when suddenly Blanche felt her waist encircled by something resembling the coil of a rope, and she was lifted up through the space intervening between the rocks, and placed, half-fainting, upon the top.

"Easy, quiet, my little dear," was whispered in her ear, as she felt the rope loosed from about her waist.

She looked up. A tall figure was bending over her. It was Wild Raven, the scout—a true friend, indeed!

Before she could speak he turned and touched a large stone, which rolled with a crunching sound over the rock into the river. In an instant a crash and a hollow groan came up from the depths below.

Wild Raven looked over the edge of the rock. He saw nothing but the mangled bodies of his savage enemies floating on the river. As he had intended, the stone had struck the canoe and its inmates, and he felt that at last his vengeance on George Barker was wrought.

"You need have no more fears of George Barker, Miss St. Ledger," the scout said, turning to Blanche; "they are all smashed into a lump."

"A thousand thanks to you for rescuing me from that villain's power," said Blanche, rising to her feet; "but you have the advantage of me—"

"Why so, Miss St. Ledger?" he asked.

"You know me, while you are unknown to me."

"Wild Raven's my name, and bymeby you'll know a great deal more about me and my friends. Please ask me no more questions now, Miss St. Ledger, but follow me; I'm your friend, and in a few minutes you'll be with—I mean in a place o' safety. Come."

The scout turned, and, followed by Blanche, descended the rock to the river. The maiden was so impressed with the novel manner in which she had been rescued, or rather lassoed from the power of the savages by the scout, that she could not doubt the sincerity of his friendly intentions and blunt assertions.

Having reached the river, the two turned and proceeded down its course. In a few minutes they came to a halt, when Wild Raven drew from under some bushes a canoe, which he immediately launched, and, with Blanche, embarked therein.

Aided by the force of the current, the scout drove the canoe down the river at a rapid rate. Neither of the voyagers spoke a word; Raven was too intent at the oars, and Blanche was too deeply engaged in studying the strange character of her rescuer, for conversation.

When they had reached a point half a mile past the place where Blanche had first seen the flitting shadow that had followed Barker's canoe, Wild Raven turned the canoe abruptly to the left and ran it under some foliage and vines drooping over the water's edge.

Rising to his feet, the scout parted the branches about his head, and revealed in the rock that rose sheer up from the water's edge, the mouth of a cavern, through which gleamed a stream of light from a ruddy fire within.

"Come, Miss St. Ledger," said Raven, turning to Blanche; "here we will remain till mornin'."

Blanche arose and allowed her companion to

assist her into the cavern, and then the two wended their way to the fire that was burning at the opposite end. The first object that met the maiden's notice was the form of a man wrapped in a blanket and lying near the fire.

"Ho! ho! my frien'," exclaimed the scout, "so you are asleep."

The man sprung quickly to his feet and glanced wildly at the intruders. Blanche uttered a cry and sprung toward him with outstretched arms. It was Gilbert Brainard in flesh and spirit!

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER RESURRECTION.

THE deepest gloom rested upon the hearts of our emigrant friends upon the island, for an inevitable death seemed almost upon them. Wild Raven had not returned after a day's absence; no tidings had been received of their daughter and sister. And, too, the humorous face and loquacious voice of Taddy Muldoon were not only missing from the breakfast-table, but from their hearts.

White Plume, reserved and silent, seemed plunged in deep thought, while Rena, unconscious of the St. Ledgers' silent sorrow, talked and sung as though no heart was sad.

The hours dragged wearily by. It was high noon, and our friends were seated at dinner, when the distant report of a rifle reached their ears, coming from up the river. White Plume hastened to his look-out, and scanned the country on all sides, but saw nothing. He resumed his seat at the dinner-table, but had scarcely done so when the report was heard again, plainer and nearer than before. It seemed to come from around the bend in the river just above the island.

"Waugh!" muttered White Plume, with an ominous shake of the head. "Mischief comin'," and he sprung to his feet again, and mounted his look-out in the tree. This time he was more successful.

He saw, crawling along the east bank of the river, in the grass, two Cheyennes with their faces turned toward the river, evidently watching some moving object with which they were keeping pace. Presently they stopped, and fired at the object of their stealthy movements, then crawled on again.

White Plume now turned his eyes to the river, on the surface of which he discovered a black object, larger than a man's head, floating down toward the island. It was this at which the Cheyennes had been firing.

The friendly Sioux was somewhat perplexed in his mind. He gazed at the floating object until a mist came over his eyes, yet he was unable to make out its real nature. There was not a doubt in his mind but that it was some human artifice—probably a trick of the Cheyennes to entrap those upon the island.

White Plume was not always to be caught napping by his enemies, so he descended from the tree and made his discovery known to his white friends, hoping that they might be able to throw some light upon the floating mystery.

Arthur St. Ledger and the Indian crawled to a point of observation at the upper side of the island. By this time the floating object was within fifty yards of them, and the Cheyennes, secreted along the banks, kept up a continual firing at it, without any perceptible effect.

The moment Arthur St. Ledger's eyes rested upon the object, a smile passed over his feature. He knew what it was. It was Mrs. St. Ledger's much treasured iron kettle, spoken of by her in the morning, and which had been left in the wagon; but, for the life of him, he could not tell what invisible power kept it afloat, mouth downward, upon the surface of the river.

St. Ledger informed White Plume of the real nature of the object, and then asked:

"What do you think about it, White Plume?"

"Ugh! Think Cheyenne head under it!" replied the Indian, eying the vessel for a moment.

At this moment several shots were fired at the kettle, the bullets glancing harmlessly aside with a metallic ring, and striking in the water several feet away, while the relic of "fireside associations" floated on, unharmed as before.

"I do not question your knowledge of your own race, White Plume," said St. Ledger. "But I think you are mistaken in a Cheyenne being under that vessel; if so, why would his friends on shore be firing at him?"

White Plume made no reply, but fixing an arrow to his bow-string, drew it to the head, and sent it whizzing through the air at the kettle. True to the mark, it struck, but glanced

off with a clear ring, and fell in the river twenty feet beyond.

"Arrah, there now, sthoph thet, for it's me's thet's coming, bedad!"

It was a deep, sepulchral voice that spoke—the voice like one speaking from the grave, yet Arthur St. Ledger recognized it with a mingled feeling of joy and mysterious awe.

It was the voice of Teddy Muldoon, without a doubt!

"White friends there!" exclaimed the Sioux, pointing at the floating kettle, then giving utterance to a whoop that thrilled the blood in the emigrants' veins.

"What is the matter, Arthur?" asked Mrs. St. Ledger, in a whisper, as she crept cautiously to her husband's side.

"Do you see that, Sarah?" asked the husband, pointing toward the reversed kettle, floating within a few feet of the island.

"Yes! Why, Arthur, it's my kettle!" returned the matron, with a smile lighting up her face.

"And do you see the agitated motion of the water around it?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is caused by Teddy, who is swimming with his body beneath the surface of the water, while his head is clad in your soup-pot." And Mr. St. Ledger's face became flushed with joyful excitement.

"But how do you know it is Teddy?" the wife questioned.

"I know—" the husband began, but before he could finish the sentence, the iron kettle rose up from the water on the shoulders of the subject of their conversation, Teddy Muldoon; in another instant the supposed defunct Irishman, with a whoop and bound, landed on the island amid a shower of whistling-bullets from either shore; and had he not stumbled and rolled headlong into the thicket undergrowth at the feet of his friends, his body would have been riddled with the leaden messengers of Cheyenne vengeance.

"Ho, friends!" exclaimed Teddy, drawing his head from the vessel, and rubbing his eyes like one just aroused from a slumber. "Me pipe's gone, but be the blessed Vargin there's a dhrap of blood left in me veins. Arrah, now, didn't I give it to the red blawgard, though?"

"Teddy, we had given you up as dead."

It was Arthur St. Ledger who addressed him, though he was scarcely able to repress a smile at the serio-comical expression on the Irishman's face.

"Och, and bedad! and it was meself that give Teddy Muldoon, Esq., up as dead, yer honor," replied Teddy, rising to his feet.

"Well, at any rate you had a narrow escape, Teddy."

"Faith, and ye sphake the truth mighty loudly, Misther St. Ledger."

"But how came you away from the island?"

"There, now, yees are comin' to the p'int; but, afore I tell yees about it, I would like a bit o' dinner, please," said the Irishman, as his eyes caught sight of the deserted dinner-table near the tent.

"Certainly, Teddy, certainly," replied St. Ledger. "Come now; dinner is ready and waiting."

The party returned, and with Teddy, seated themselves at their half-finished meal. They were soon joined by Harry and Rena, who had been watching at the lower side of the island, and were totally ignorant of Teddy's return until they saw him at the table, eating as voraciously as a half-famished wolf.

CHAPTER XV.

FLOATING.

THE first thing that Wild Raven did on awakening from his night's rest, was to crawl to the entrance of the cavern, and reconnoiter the situation before venturing out. Finding the coast clear, he dropped himself down into the canoe at the entrance, and by means of a simple contrivance, succeeded in catching several fine trout. With these he re-entered the cavern, and joined Gilbert and Blanche.

A fire was already burning, and in a few moments, Wild Raven, with the assistance of Blanche, had the trout dressed and broiling on the hot coals. As this took some time—to broil the fish without burning—the scout opened a conversation with his young friends.

"You seem quite strong this mornin', Gil," he said, "and exceedin'ly cheerful."

"Why shouldn't I be so, after running such fearful risks of my life yesterday?" asked Gilbert.

"Sartinly; cheerfulness is the life o' many persons, and I b'lieve you are one o' that sort,"

replied the scout. "You shouldn't be gloomy and morose at heart because you *didn't* git killed by George Barker—curse him! Excuse me, Miss St. Ledger, for my impoliteness," he said, turning to Blanche, "but that fiend has cast a cloud over my heart."

"In what way, or how, Raven?"

"Hist!" commanded the scout, evasively, as he bent his ear in the attitude of listening.

"What do you hear?" asked Gilbert, in a whisper.

"I was sure I heard a noise in the river; however I'll go and see," and rising to his feet, he glided toward the mouth of the cavern.

True enough, the first object that he saw was an Indian, crawling along the edge of the water, under the ledge, evidently intending to steal their canoe.

Picking up a large stone that lay at his feet, the scout awaited the near approach of the red-skin.

In a moment he was alongside the canoe, and the next instant his head was crushed for his temerity. But scarcely had the stone left the scout's hand, when a rifle on the opposite side of the river cracked, and a bullet whizzed past his head, and was flattened against the rock behind him.

Withdrawing himself a pace or two back into the cavern, Raven scanned the opposite bluff. Near a clump of wild sage he saw a puff of white smoke hanging on the air, and through it he saw the evil face of the savage that had fired the shot.

In a moment the scout brought his rifle to bear upon him, but with what effect he could not ascertain; at any rate, he saw nothing more of the red assassin, and returning to his friends, he said:

"I tell you, friends, we're in close quarters, or will be, unless we git out o' here soon. The red devils have diskivered our retreat."

"Well, I am sure there is nothing to detain us but breakfast," said Gilbert.

"And that is all ready for eating," said Blanche, glancing, with the pride of a royal cook, at the crisp-brown fish that lay smoking on some large green leaves.

The trio seated themselves and ate heartily of the savory viands, and when their hunger was appeased, there was some fish left, which was saved for future use.

It required but a few minutes to prepare for departure. Wild Raven went in advance to reconnoiter their situation; but he found the way clear, and in a short time they were all seated in the canoe, and journeying rapidly down the river.

In two hours they reached the cavern where Gilbert and Blanche had been surprised and captured by the savages, the day previous.

A halt of a few minutes was made here, to procure some skins and blankets that had escaped the savages; then they continued their journey down the river until they came to a point just opposite the grove where Gilbert and Blanche met the night before the last one, and where the scout had seen the two horses, belonging to Blanche's father, cropping grass in the valley. Here they left the river and took to the plain.

They had traveled but a short distance when, to their great joy, they discovered the two horses not more than half a mile distant from the grove wherein Blanche had left them and fled with Gilbert.

A few minutes' walk brought them to the animals. The bridles were still upon them as when Blanche left them.

When the maiden put out her hand and spoke the dumb brutes pricked up their ears and advanced toward her with almost a human look.

"Poor Abe and Dolph," she said, patting them kindly; "they are kind and gentle to me, although I used them hard."

Gilbert and Blanche mounted the animals, Wild Raven preferring to walk, and then turning their faces due north, set off for the Platte river, twenty-five miles distant.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHO IS WILD RAVEN?

AFTER Teddy had finished his dinner, and lamented for some time over the loss of his borrowed pipe, he was induced to narrate his adventures during his absence from the island.

"Faith, and when I see'd the red devil," he began, "come and shtael Misther White Feather's canoe, I niver sed a word but dhraped me gun, shlipped into the wather, and swum afther the spalpeen, who was so excited that he niver knew I was afther him, till I war into the canoe."

"Oh! how me's wished for me ould shillalah

then! But wishing did no good, so I dhrew me knife and went in rough and tumble, jist as me's used to do at Donnybrook; but, be the howly Vargin, the red imp began to git the upper hand o' me, so I jist managed to fall out into the wather, and I tell yees, we war hugging each other tighter than bears. We sunk and rose in the wather, then sunk ag'in. This time we become parted, and thinking discription the better part of valor, me's cut a bee-line under the wather for land. Mind, now, there's but a few that kin ixcel Tedy Muldoon in shwimming on the wather or under it."

"When I reached shore I found that I was on the main land, inshtead of the island, so I fell back into the grove, and shpent the night in a three-top, and this morning me's crept round to the wagon and shpent half a day there, thrying to study some way to git back to the island. At lasht, me eyes fell on Misthress St. Ledger's blessed soup-kettle, and having consiidered its impenethrability, I concluded to hide me body under the wather; then turn the kittle over me head, and shwim to the island."

"The resht of me shtory yees know, though I will jist say that when the bullets came rattling ag'inst the kittle, I felt the wather freezing along me back like polar icebergs."

"Indeed, you had quite an adventure, Teddy," said St. Ledger, as the Irishman rounded off his story with a lamentation for his pipe.

"Indade I had, yer honor; but me life war saved by that dear old kittle."

The day wore slowly away. The Cheyennes were seen no more; still a heavy weight hung upon the St. Ledgers' hearts. No tidings had yet been received of Blanche, and hopes of her recovery were fast fading from their breasts.

The sun was sinking behind the distant mountain-tops, throwing long bars of amber light over the plain and woodland, when, all of a sudden, a canoe containing three persons, came in view around an abrupt bend in the river, just below the island.

A cry of joy escaped the emigrants' lips as they recognized Blanche and Wild Raven as two of the occupants.

"Oh, there comes my papa! there comes my papa!" shouted Rena, pointing toward the canoe, almost frantic with joy.

"Who is your papa, child?" asked Mr. St. Ledger.

"Why, don't you see him? The scout, Wild-mere Ravennaugh, is my papa."

"Sarah!" exclaimed Mr. St. Ledger, with sudden emotion, "do you recognize that third person? It is that villain, Gilbert Brainard!" and all the old-time anger flashed in his eyes.

At this juncture the canoe touched the island. Blanche sprung ashore into her mother's arms. Rena clasped her arms about Wild Raven's neck in a fond embrace, while Arthur St. Ledger confronted Gilbert Brainard, saying:

"Assassin, how *dare* you come near me?"

"I come with a clear conscience, and hands stained with nobody's blood, Arthur St. Ledger," responded Gilbert, unflinchingly.

"Then why did you flee the vengeance of the law when I accused you of attempted murder?"

"I went at the humble protestations of your daughter, not through fear or guilt."

"Father, I bear witness to Gilbert's truthful assertion," said Blanche, coming to Brainard's assistance. "It was I who begged him to flee the law. It was George Barker who attempted to kill you."

"How know you this, daughter?" asked St. Ledger.

"George Barker told me so yesterday, in a fit of revenge. He is a chief among the Indians, and it was he who carried me from the tent and struck mother to the ground; but he is dead now."

Arthur St. Ledger did not doubt his daughter's word. A pang of remorse pierced his heart as he realized the wrong he had done Gilbert Brainard, and taking the young man by the hand, he said:

"Forgive me, Gilbert, for the wrongs I have done you, as you would wish to be forgiven. My heart tells me you are innocent."

"I forgive you freely," replied Gilbert, wringing St. Ledger's hand warmly.

"I must admit, Gilbert, that I have been blind in reason, and that, in the case of George Barker, I have been the victim of misplaced confidence; but, thank God, I have lived to correct the greatest error of my life," said St. Ledger, penitentially.

"And I thank God that I no longer bear the name of murderer," replied Gilbert.

"Here, Miss St. Ledger," called Wild Raven;

"here is my darter Rena, of whom I was telling you a bit ago."

Blanche advanced to Rena and embraced her, as though she had been a sister, while the scout looked on with admiration.

"How does it come, friend, that you did not tell us that you had a daughter, when you were telling us of your past life?" asked St. Ledger.

"For the reason that I did not know she was livin'. Five years ago, friends, I camped on this very island, with my wife and child, and this friendly Sioux, White Plume. I was a hunter then, on my way to Fort Laramie. During the night we were attacked by a band of Cheyenne Ingins under Red Wolf, better known as George Barker. My wife was killed, and Rena and White Plume were captured. I alone escaped. The next morning, after the Ingins left, I come back to the island and buried my poor, murdered wife. She sleeps beneath that tree on which you see the letters 'M' and 'R,' rudely carved. So this island, my friends, is a sacred spot to me. Five long and torturous years passed by, in which I have been searching for my child, and never, until yesterday, did I see her. I met her and her faithful friend, White Plume, in a grove twenty miles south of here.

"White Plume had rescued her—after gainin' his own liberty—while that devil, Red Wolf, was absent from the village. I sent them here—told them that you were here, and I also told Rena not to tell you whose child she was until I come. I merely wished to make the explanation that I have, so that you would have no grounds to consider me the singular being that I appeared to be, when I first met you."

"Then that accounts for Rena's refusal to tell her full name," said Mrs. St. Ledger.

"Exactly," replied the scout. "Her name is Rena Ravenaugh. Mine is Wildmere Ravenaugh, though I prefer Wild Raven."

The whole tone and texture of the scout's voice had changed, from the rude language so common to backwoodsmen, to that of a man of educated mind, which facts our friends were not slow in observing.

"What about Jake Darle, the missing guide, Raven?" asked St. Ledger. "Did you hear or see anything of him during your absence?"

"No," replied the scout, "but we recovered your horses; they are over in the grove yonder."

"A thousand thanks, Wild Raven," exclaimed St. Ledger; "you have more than befriended us in our moment of peril. Come to our camp; I know you are all tired and hungry. We will have you a sumptuous supper in a few moments."

So saying, the party retired to camp, leaving White Plume and Teddy on guard, for night was fast settling over the land.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WINDFALL.

AFTER supper had been served and each of the friends had related his adventures of the last two days, arrangements were made for passing the night.

Gilbert Brainard and White Plume were sent over to the main-land to guard the horses, while Teddy and Harry were stationed as guards upon the island, for Wild Raven predicted some trouble from the red-skins before morning.

Gilbert and White Plume led the horses to an opening in the forest where grass could be obtained for them, and then withdrew to the shadow of the trees, and having separated, took their positions at opposite points at the edge of the clearing where the animals were tethered.

Somewhat fatigued in mind and body, Gilbert seated himself at the foot of a low, scrubby pine tree, and leaning his head against the trunk, gave way to his own reflections. He reviewed his past life, which had been thickly strewn with the sharpest thorns, and overcast by the darkest clouds of misfortune; yet, there had been enough of sunshine to infuse into his soul a desire for further continuance of the life so bitterly begun.

An hour—two hours passed by, and not a sound had disturbed the young man's reverie, save that deep and solemn sound of nature that is always heard in the forest after nightfall. Gilbert had begun to congratulate himself upon the prospect of being entirely rid of the savages, when the snapping of a twig near by caused him to start up and grasp his rifle.

Through the gloom he discovered two dark figures moving toward the opening where the animals were grazing. They were, evidently,

ignorant of his presence, for they moved so close to him that he had no trouble in recognizing them to be two white men.

Filled with some curiosity to ascertain their mission, and whether they were friends or enemies, Gilbert remained quiet and watched them.

They moved on until they reached the edge of the opening, then, with an exclamation of surprise, they stopped and sprung quickly back into the shadow of the trees.

"Lord, Harry! What's that, Belzy?" asked one of the worthy pair.

Gilbert started. He felt his heart rising in his throat. He clutched nervously at his gun. That voice had startled him with a feeling of revenge and horror; it was the voice of George Barker. However, by a mighty effort, he succeeded in keeping back the storm that was rising within him—bent his ear and listened to their conversation, which was quite audible.

"Ghosts, as I live!" responded the individual addressed as Belzy.

"Ghosts, the devil! Take a second look, my brave friend, and you'll see that it's a pair of horses tethered there at grass—the same ones that I toted that gal off on," said Barker, for he it was.

"So it is—so it is," replied Belzy, coming out of his sudden fear; "but I'll bet all of old Wilson's buried treasure that more than one pair of eyes are watching them animals."

"So will I," thought Gilbert.

"Well, what of it?" gruffly asked Barker.

"Humph! well, what of it? Suppose we go into that opening to look for the gold, and git a bullet apiece into our carcasses—what of it then, worthy friend?"

"That bullet hasn't been cast that kills me, Belzy, but for fear of trouble, we had better not venture out into the opening to-night."

"Are you sure this is the place where the gold is buried, Barker?"

"Well, let me see. The description found upon the dead man's body, taken in connection with the story of the fellow we hung, fixes the opening about this point upon the river."

"But what's it say 'bout the trees?"

"It says a tall cottonwood stands out a few feet in the opening alone, on the east side, while another stands out all alone on the south side."

"Good! There is a tree just ahead of us that will answer for the one on the south side, and over yonder stands one on the east side. Ha-ha! So much for the buried gold!"

"Sh, Belzy! Your eyes are extraordinary good; but confound your tongue, it's like a clapper in a bell. Don't talk so loud."

"Thank you. Quite a compliment," said Belzy, lowering his voice, but not below Gilbert's hearing. "Let me see," the worthy continued, "what does the description say to do, after the opening and the trees are found, in order to find the exact point where the gold is cached?"

Gilbert had become greatly interested in the two villains' colloquy, and bent his ear attentively to catch each word.

"Well, it says, when the sun rises in the morning, draw a line along the south side of the shadow cast by the east tree, and at exactly noon, draw a line along the east side of the shadow cast by the south tree; then, at the very point where the two lines cross each other, the gold was, or is buried. Now do you understand, or will I have to repeat again, so that if there is any one about, they will know as much of the gold and its cache as we do?"

"Oh, certainly—certainly," replied Belzy, "I understand to a gnat's eye."

"And so do I, my worthy villains," thought Gilbert.

"Well, if you understand, then, and have no more questions to ask, suppose we make tracks from here—"

"Until when?" interrupted Belzy.

"That depends on circumstances. If the emigrants continue their journey to-morrow, I must attend to that other little affair; I can't give up that gal without another effort. In that case, I might be absent only a day or two, and may be a week or a month."

"Oh! oh!" groaned Belzy, "so long."

"Yes, so long; and while I am gone, I want you to hoof it back to the Cheyennes and stay there with them till I come back."

"Ho-ho! So you're afraid that I'll dig up the treasure and cut dirt, eh, while you're gone? There might be such a thing happen."

"Do it, if you dare, and I'll foller you to purgatory but what I'll catch you and cut your throat."

"Well, I guess we'll have no trouble about that, Barker; and now, if we're goin' to pros-

pect any, let's be at it: if not, let's lean out for camp."

"I think we had better let the gold be to-night, and go back to camp."

"All right. Suppose we take the horses and ride."

"Suppose we don't. Come, still your bell-clapper."

So saying, the worthy pair of villains turned about and moved briskly away toward the south-west, leaving Gilbert in the deepest mental speculation over the subject of their conversation.

Could it really be possible that any gold was buried in the opening? If so, hadn't he as good right to it as the renegades? Such were the thoughts that went surging across Gilbert's mind, and he resolved to take advantage of the villain's description of the burial-spot of the treasure, and if there was any thing there, he would appropriate it for his own use in case the rightful owner did not come up and prove his property.

Slowly the night wore away, and dawn approached. Just as the sun looked over the eastern hills, Gilbert and White Plume met in the opening.

Gilbert related his adventure to the friendly Sioux, and then proceeded to mark the shadow of the east tree according to Barker's description.

The shadow reached quite across the opening, and was marked by the young man by means of small poles laid along the edge of the shadow, and fastened there by driving forked sticks over them at each end.

This done, the pair took up their rifles and set out to join their friends at the island. Arriving there, they found them all up, stirring about. Nothing had occurred during the night to molest the quietude of their slumbers, consequently they were all looking fresh and vigorous but Mrs. St. Ledger, who was confined to her bed with a violent headache.

Gilbert took Wild Raven aside and made known to him the fact that George Barker was still alive, and the conversation he had heard between the renegades during his watch in the night.

"Curse him!" exclaimed the scout, "it seems as though that devil wasn't made to be killed, for I made sure of him the other night I thought. But, the buried gold—we will go over at noon and complete the search you have already begun. If there is any gold there, I would like to know how it come there."

"From what I could gather from this conversation," replied Gilbert, "I supposed that two returning miners were encamped hereabouts, and being closely pressed by a party of savages under Barker, they were compelled to consign their gold to the safe-keeping of the earth, and flee for their lives, but eventually fell into the savages' power and were killed, the renegades having forced from them such information as would lead to the recovery of their gold."

"In that case," said Wild Raven, "you would be as much entitled to the gold as the renegades, in case you can find it."

Their conversation was here brought to a close by Blanche St. Ledger announcing breakfast.

On account of Mrs. St. Ledger's illness, the continuance of the emigrants' journey was deferred until the next day. This would give Gilbert and the scout time to search for the buried treasure, for they intended to accompany them on their journey.

Toward noon the two men crossed over to the opening in the timber, but they had said nothing of their mission to the emigrants.

At the exact hour and minute, Gilbert drew the line along the shadow of the south tree, by means of a rope brought from the island.

"There," said he, pointing to the angle where the rope crossed the poles, according to Barker's statement, the gold is buried."

Wild Raven examined the ground closely, and replied:

"I can't see any signs of the ground having been disturbed here, though that is no evidence it has not, for if the miners were shrewd men, they would have replaced every spear of grass, in order to conceal the cache from the eyes of the Indians."

Down upon their knees sunk the two men, and with a hunting-knife and tomahawk, began loosening the earth, which they removed with their hands. Their progress was slow and tedious, yet they faltered not an instant. Down, slowly down they went into the earth. Suddenly the point of Wild Raven's knife grated upon something hard; a shout of joy escapes

his lips as he digs away and finds it is an iron buckle upon some leathern article, which, as they continue to dig, they find is a *pair of saddle-bags*.

"Eureka!" shouted Wild Raven, as, with a Herculean effort, he seized the bags and dragged them from the hole; and as he did so, Gilbert discovered another pair beneath, and seizing hold of them, he drew them to the top, also. Their search had doubly rewarded their efforts.

Hastily tearing open the saddle-bags—which were in a good state of preservation—they found them to be filled with gold bullion of the value of twenty thousand dollars each. There was not a word nor a letter by which they could tell aught of the original owners; so, according to all customary rules of the past, the right of ownership fell to them.

Refastening the saddle-bags, the men slung them across their shoulders and returned to the island.

Quite a scene took place when they related their discovery to the emigrants. Despite his refusal, Gilbert and the scout forced Arthur St. Ledger to accept half the gold bullion, while they divided the remaining half between themselves.

Thus every thing speedily assumed a new phase in consequence of finding the treasure. Arthur St. Ledger had sufficient wealth now to keep him above want, in case he used it judiciously; and what need had he of leading his family into further dangers now, far from the enjoyment and social and moral influence of civilized society. He could see none, and seconded in his resolution by his family, Gilbert and the scout, he resolved to turn about and return to the States; and with this intention, they began making preparations for departure on the morrow.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE MISSING GUIDE.

THE morning came with its sunshine and glory and song of birds. Now all was joy and laughter, hurry and bustle, for our friends on the island were eager to be off on their return eastward.

Breakfast was speedily dispatched, and then the party bid farewell to the island, and crossed over to the mainland.

Fortunately they found their wagon uninjured, save that it was stripped of its canvas covering. This, however, was easily replaced by Indian blankets.

Teddy hastily harnessed the faithful animals to the wagon—the women were seated comfortably therein—the men, with their rifles on their shoulders, took their position behind the team on foot—the driver cracked his whip, and the vehicle rolled away.

White Plume was to accompany them until they reached the overland road, which the emigrants had left on the night of their first troubles, two miles to the south in order to procure grass and water for their animals. Raven tried to induce him to go with them; but no, he could not, he would not leave his native haunts, with its vast plains, murmuring rivers, roaring rapids, singing cascades and rippling brooks; beyond these the world had no charms for him; besides, he had a terrible vengeance to wreak upon his enemies, the Cheyennes, for the injury received at their hands, and all because he was a friend to the whites.

The emigrants had hardly left the timber two hundred yards behind, when all of a sudden a prolonged shout for help, mingled with the blood-curdling yells of Indians fell upon their ears.

Turning about they saw, issue from the timber directly on their trail, a white man, whom they at once recognized as Jake Darle, the missing guide, running toward them at the top of his speed, closely pursued by half a dozen savages.

"Help! help! friends," implored the apparently exhausted fugitive. "Help! for the love o' Heaven! I am about goin' under—help! help!"

Our friends were so taken by surprise, that they had no time to question their late suspicions in regard to the guide's treachery, but all rushed to his assistance.

The savages saw them coming, and beat a hasty retreat to the timber, while Darle staggered on, and fell exhausted at the feet of his deliverers.

"In the name of Heaven, Darle! what does this all mean?" St. Ledger asked, bending over the prostrate man.

It was some time before the guide could recover his breath, to reply, in gasps

"It means—that I—have es—caped—from the red devils' power—; thank—God you are—safe!"

"Yes, we are safe," returned St. Ledger, eying the guide closely, "and are just leaving the place. We had come to the conclusion that you had deserted us, and sent the Indians down upon us."

"Faith, bedad, and it's me's thet thinks so yit," said Teddy, who had left the team with the women, and joined the men at this juncture.

"Who dares to accuse me of treachery?" exclaimed Darle, fiercely springing to his feet with all his usual agility and strength, and boldly confronting the Irishman.

"Me's, yer honor," coolly replied the little Irish Jehu.

"Teddy Muldoon, if it wern't for the littleness and meanness o' the act, I'd larrup you within an inch o' your life for sich a bold, false and uncalled for accusation," said the guide, considerably exasperated. "Had I come to you in any other way than I did—pursued by a band o' bloodthirsty savages, and sufferin' with all the pain o' cruel treatment durin' my captivity—I wouldn't have blamed you for accusin' me o' bein' a traitor then, but as 't is it goes 'ginst the grain; however—"

"The only grounds upon which we were led to doubt your fidelity, taken in connection with your prolonged absence," said St. Ledger, coming as an umpire between Teddy and the guide, "arose from certain signals that Teddy saw you make with fire, in answer to other and similar signals made by some one across the river."

"I deny the charge o' making a single signal o' any kind," the guide emphatically declared, with a slight tremor in his voice.

Wild Raven who had hitherto remained silent, now stepped forward, and laying his hand upon the guide's shoulder, said:

"Your denial of the charge, Mr. Darle, has fully established your guilt, for I saw you make the signals myself!"

"And I will prove further, that this person calling himself Jake Darle, is an unmitigated coward, traitor, liar and murderer!" exclaimed Gilbert Brainard, and springing forward like an enraged tiger, he seized the guide by the beard, and tore the cunning mask from his face, leaving the pale abject features of George Barker revealed to the astonished gaze of his friends.

"Curse you, devil!" hissed the unmasked villain, drawing a long knife. "You have foiled my plan—robbed me of the gold, but you shall not live to enjoy it!"

The wretch would have driven the weapon to Gilbert's heart, had not Wild Raven been on the alert, and hurled the villain to the ground, and with the assistance of White Plume, wrenched the knife from his grasp, and bound him hand and foot.

"Oh, murderer!" hissed the scout. "You'll not escape me *this* time. I thought the stone had crushed your vile life out the other night, but fate has kept you for a worse punishment. Ha! ha! my time has come! Do you expect mercy after murdering my wife and carrying off my child? Surely not. The mills of the gods grind slow, but exceedingly fine. My heart cries out for your blood!"

"Kill me if you wish, I am in your power," said the villain, Barker. "But let me tell you that your child lives, and in case you murder me, you will never see her again. I've some consolation in knowing that, even if I am to die."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the scout, triumphantly. "Know you not, devil, that my daughter is already rescued from the power of your minions, and safe in that wagon yonder?"

"Who rescued her?" gasped Barker, a spasm of hopelessness convulsing his abject features.

"White Plume!" returned the scout.

"White Plume," sneered Barker. "A dog of the pale-faces." White Plume heard the renegade's insult. A low cry of vengeance escaped his lips, and drawing a scalping knife, he bounded toward the villain, and with a single flourish of the weapon, tore the scalp from his head; then, bending low, he thrust the reeking blade into the wretch's heart.

With a groan of agony, George Barker sunk to the earth and expired. His days of evil were ended as his crimes deserved.

Leaving the body to the mercy of the wolves and vultures, our friends continued their journey.

At the overland road they parted with White Plume, having repaid him for his services, with

the present of a handsome double-barreled rifle. They never saw him again, though they often heard of him through deeds of kindness rendered the emigrants.

Our friends shaped their eastward course toward the young and promising State of Iowa, where they eventually arrived without further troubles from the Indians.

Here Arthur St. Ledger, Wildmere Raven-
naugh and Gilbert Brainard began life anew, engaging in agricultural pursuits, with the results that always attend the honest and industrious tiller of the soil and tender of flocks and herds.

And now our story is ended. We have only to add that Gilbert and Blanche, Harry and Rena were married, and settled down into a promising and happy life.

Wild Raven, as he still insists on being called, lives with his children, and finds life else than a burden of sorrow and turmoil. He is getting old, but in the midst of his grandchildren he finds great happiness and comfort.

Teddy still lives, and is in the service of his old employer, enjoying the sweets of single blessedness and his pipe, though rumor says he is soon to be married to a buxom maid, late from his own "country," and will settle down on a quarter section of his own.

THE END.

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